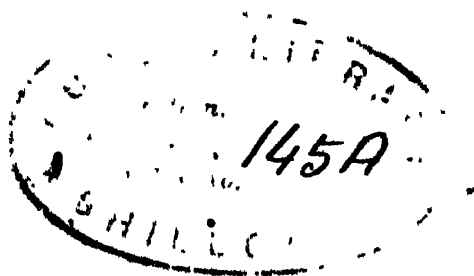


THE SPANISH LADY



By the Same Author

Novels

ESTHER VANHOMRICH
A VILLAGE TRAGEDY
THE VAGABONDS
WEEPING FERRY
SONS OF THE SWORD
THE KING'S REVOKE
THE INVADER

Plays

WILD JUSTICE
THE PRINCESS OF HANOVER
THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Poems

COLLECTED POEMS
THE RETURN AND OTHER POEMS

THE SPANISH LADY

By

MARGARET L. WOODS



3217/RR2/E/Rf
D.H.2

JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXXVII
MADE & PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROM AND
LONDON



CHAPTER I

IT was a long time since God had made anything quite so beautiful as this Spanish lady. It would have been hard to find a defect in doña Ismena, Condesa de Careno, from the tip of her silken-stockinged foot, which was twiddling its little toes in the warmth of the blazing logs, to the top of her head, which doña Pilar was decking for the ball. She held a mirror in her hand and glanced at it from time to time. But it was not really needed. Pilar knew so well how to arrange the ringlets upon Ismena's forehead and run the gold and rose band through them; how to lightly, fantastically knot the glossy black hair on the crown of her head. Yet towards the end of the process Ismena looked in the mirror critically, turning her graceful head this way and that.

'I beg you, Pilar *mia*, not to put in that great clumsy comb. Take the mother-o'-pearl and gold one.'

Doña Pilar held in her hand a large gold comb, loaded with diamonds.

'But, Ismenita! This one was a present from El Lord.'

'Never mind! Put in the comb I like.'

Doña Pilar raised her eyes to heaven and sighed. But seeing in the hand-glass that Ismena's lovely face wore its wilful look, she obeyed. And certainly that little comb of carved mother-o'-pearl

THE SPANISH LADY

and gold filigree crowned the small head to perfection.

Dofia Pilar was the Condesa's waiting-gentlewoman, her Dueña and her cousin too. Naturally she had her views on the affairs of the family.

'What a capricious little monkey!' she exclaimed gently, yet reproachfully. 'I beg you, *amighita*, to consider your honoured father, your brothers, all of your family, before you abandon Velintón. What fault have you to find with the man?'

Ismena, standing up and letting the *peignoir* slip off her shoulders, shrugged them ever so slightly.

'He is too old.'

'Old! *Mujer!* The man is in the prime of life. Now the Conde, your husband, I admit —'

'The poor Conde is of course old and ill too. That's not his fault. And one's family naturally chooses one's husband; but a lover one expects to choose for oneself. And I will. *Si, Señora!*'

Dofia Pilar stood stock-still, in dismay, holding the wisp of gold tissue and rose-coloured silk which was Ismena's ball-dress.

'*Mona mia!* What lover could you possibly prefer to El Lord, to Velintón, the Hero of Salamanca, the greatest man in Spain?'

Ismena smiled. She slipped into her ball-dress and looked at herself in a long dim wall-mirror, with painted flowers straying across it. The mirror reflected Ismena full-length and behind her the chaos of the small bedroom; the bed in the nook piled

THE SPANISH LADY

with music and cast-off clothes, a guitar, shoes and castanets; the chairs, the floor, the dressing-table similarly encumbered. The figure of Ismena, glittering upon this background, was like a jewel on a rubbish-heap.

'My diamonds, please, Pilar.'

Then a stream of light flowed round her neck and over her bosom. Doña Pilar, arranging the diamonds, said:

'I do not alarm myself because you talk nonsense, *mona mia*. I know you to be the best, the most devoted daughter and sister in the world. Also, there is in fact no one in Cadiz whom you would choose to have for a lover instead of El Lord.'

Ismena, smiling at her own reflection, replied: 'You are mistaken. I would choose to have a very young man, with blond hair and blue, blue eyes. *Un guapo!* That is the lover I want, and Caramba! I will have him.'

With one hand on her hip, she swayed on her haunches, standing sideways to the mirror and receiving the encouragement of a defiant smile from the glittering vision in its depths. Then as Pilar uttered a cry of dismay, she broke into a laugh, flung her arms round the dueña's neck and kissed her lightly on the tip of her nose.

'*Vamos!* Don't cry, *amighita!* No one knows what I am going to do — not I myself nor even the Blessed Virgin!'

A knock at the door. Pilar opened. ~~and~~ an old

THE SPANISH LADY

man in livery announced that the Condesa's brother the Conde don Alonzo had arrived and was in the salon.

'*Dios mio!*' exclaimed the Condesa. 'I did not know he had returned to Cadiz. Quick, *amighita!* My shoes! My handkerchief! My shawl!'

Throwing round her a heavy black silk shawl, embroidered with coloured flowers, she hurried down a stone staircase to a small tiled salon. It was meagrely furnished, for the Quinta was something between a farmhouse and a seaside villa. But two heavy silver candelabra, furnished with wax candles, lighted the room, and it was overheated by a large brass *brasero* full of charcoal. There was the Conde don Alonzo, only surviving son of the Marquès de la Peña—to which proud name was added, Spanish fashion, a long string of the proudest names of Spain. Ismena embraced her brother affectionately. Although only of middle stature, she was considerably taller than he. In don Alonzo the degeneracy of the Court Aristocracy of Spain was manifest. The large-eyed, weak-chinned little face would have been pretty in a woman, but was already puffy and sallow when compared with the perfect lines and clear colouring of his sister's. Even the small white be ringed hand, of which he was so proud, was beginning to be puffy. His usual expression might be silly, but it was amiable. For the moment it was fretful.

'What a surprise, *hermanito mio!*' exclaimed

THE SPANISH LADY

Ismena. 'How did you get here? Why did you not tell me you were coming?'

'I came from Seville by water, with all the haste I could,' replied Alonzo. 'We all felt it was necessary I should see you at once about this terrible affair.'

Ismena turned pale and clasped her hands.

'*Gesù, Maria y José!* What is the matter? Has the Conde, my husband, had another of his attacks?'

'You need not worry about him,' replied Alonzo. 'So long as he can find a new doctor in Spain and a new set of people to hear him tell the rosary of his complaints, the Señor Conde de Careno is a soul in Paradise. No, Señora! What I want to know is whether this infernal *Rubio Velintòn* really and in fact is your lover?'

'*Ave Maria purissima!* Is it possible that you and the Marquès my father do not approve of him?'

'Approve! *Caracoles!* It is not a question whether we approve of the heretic pig. A curse on him and the whole drunken red-faced, red-coated herd of them!'

'But the poor Lord is not drunken, he is not red-faced — at least not very.' And a smile flickered back to her lips again.

'*Vamos, hermanita!* Let us be serious. I suppose you thought you could throw over Velintòn with no more consequences than if you had thrown over a little Abbé.'

'What do you mean?' asked Ismena, astonished. 'I have not thrown over Velintòn — not as yet.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Then I suppose he is tired of you.'

'Tired of me?' She drew herself up and frowned. 'I have never given a man the chance of being tired of me. No, Señor! Ask El Lord's friends whether he is tired of me!' She laughed scornfully, with wavings of her fan.

Alonzo shrugged his shoulders.

'He takes a strange way of showing his love. Do you not know that he is at this moment endeavouring to compel the Regency to bring your father and myself, our cousins the Marquès de Montespínosa, Diego, and several others, to trial before the Cortes?'

'*Hombre!*' shrieked Ismena. 'What for? Treason?'

'For malversation, yes, Señora! Malversation.' Alonzo reiterated the word with an accent of supreme contempt. 'This foreign bully presumes to attack the privileges of the grandees of Holy and Catholic Spain.'

'But tell me exactly what has happened,' implored Ismena.

'You are but a woman and probably do not know that the immensely rich English Government has from time to time sent over sums for the support of the Spanish Armies and the provisioning of their own. Our honoured father and myself and others of our family have had the handling of part of these enormous sums – which are, however, but trifles to the English. Do they really suppose that we grandees and nobles of Spain, the most important

THE SPANISH LADY

personages in the State, have no right to our share of their tribute? Is it all to be divided among the rabble, common soldiers, peasants who supply the armies with food, traders who sell swords, guns and God knows what? Absurd! Yet this wild, beast of an Englishman is pressing for us – us grandees and hidalgos to be brought to trial. We, *we*, are to be brought to trial, like common robbers.'

'*Santa Virgen de los Dolores perdonadme!*' wailed Ismena. 'Wherein have our honoured father and you and the others differed from other people? What devil has put it into the man's head to pick out you for persecution?'

'How should I know?' returned Alonzo, furious. 'I was even about to ask some favour of the brute. For I must tell you the Marquès your father and I have been much surprised to receive no mark of favour from him. We have blamed you, Ismena. But no doubt you have been unfaithful to him and this is the fellow's revenge.'

Ismena flung her fan open with a rattle.

'Unfaithful! *Ay de mí!* I have been a slave to the *Rubio*, a complete slave. I can only suppose that he does not know that it is my father and brother, my family that he is attacking.'

Alonzo stared.

'Not know that you are of the House of la Peña? – Impossible!'

'One would say so, *hermanito*. But remember that in fact I have seen very little of this mad

THE SPANISH LADY

Englishman. He is here, he is gone, he is back, he is away, and busy, busy, always busy. *Gesà!* It fatigues one even to think of him and his busy-ness.'

'And you have positively never spoken to him of the family of la Peña?'

Alonzo was shocked. He looked disapprovingly at his sister. She defended herself.

'*Cà* - ! Velintòn is not my husband. He is my lover, and you may guess he does not come here to talk about my family. I assure you he gives me no time in which to do so. The unfortunate man is the slave of a big gold watch. He makes love between two ticks of it. Tick! El Lord arrives. Tick, tick! He rides off. Tick! He is in Cadiz again - I suppose the Lord Watch is content.' She laughed merrily. 'But I have once or twice made him forget the laws and commands of the noble Lord Tick-tick. The English are therefore very much concerned. They are saying I must be a witch.'

'Be serious, Ismenita, I beg!' implored don Alonzo.

'*Chiquillo!* There is no need to pull a long face,' she replied, placing one hand on his shoulder and the other under his chin. 'I will speak to Velintòn this evening at the ball to which he has invited me. When he learns what a terrible mistake he has made, he will be overwhelmed with shame and regret; for I assure you he is very much a gentleman. Then will be the time to ask of him any favour you may desire.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Here their conversation was cut short by the entrance of the old man-servant.

'The Señor Visconde de Tremblaye is here, Señora,' he said.

'Ah, I had forgotten him!' exclaimed Ismena – and turning to her brother – 'He offered to come and paint my face for the ball. He has a new rouge from Paris. Shall I admit him?'

'Certainly,' replied Alonzo. 'He is a friend and can give us the latest news as to how Velintón is progressing in his abominable design.'

There entered a youngish man, tall and slight, with thin ironic lips and narrow grey eyes. He wore a black evening dress of the latest London fashion. He might easily have passed for an Englishman had he not embraced Alonzo on both cheeks and kissed the Condesa's hand with Continental grace. Alcide, Vicomte de Tremblaye, was the son of French royalist parents, and educated in England. He had been given a small post in the Civil Service of the British Army and earned a little by painting miniatures of pretty ladies in short waists – the Condesa de Careno among others – and pretty officers in uniform. But he always appeared to have as much money as a gentleman needed, and was supposed to be really in the Secret Service.

Monsieur de Tremblaye greeted the brother and sister in French, his Spanish being less fluent than his English.

'Behold, Señora Condesa!' he said, bowing deeply



THE SPANISH LADY

and holding out a small box on the palm of a well-shaped hand. 'This is the rouge which I promised to procure you from Paris.'

Ismena cried out, with the pleasure of a child receiving a box of sweets. She opened the box and rubbed some of the rouge upon her hand.

'*Gesù!* How fine! What a beautiful shade! And you have managed to procure it from Paris? *Qué diablo!*'

De Tremblaye smiled his crooked smile at the compliment.

'That is easy enough,' he replied. 'The Basque smugglers snap their fingers at Bonaparte. But you promised me, Madame, that if I could get the rouge, I should have the privilege of applying it myself to the most beautiful face in Spain.'

'You shall apply it to mine at any rate,' replied Ismena. 'Who could do it so well as a painter like yourself?'

De Tremblaye took a large silk handkerchief out of his pocket, directed Ismena to a chair and spread it over her shoulders.

'We must protect the pretty dress,' he said, 'and the still prettier shoulders. It is half a sin to meddle with this face, yet since you must add something to perfection, let it be done by the hand of an artist.'

He produced other details from his pockets and placed them on the table. Then he set to work to colour the animated oval of the Condesa's face as calmly as though it had been a bit of ivory. So doing

THE SPANISH LADY

he emitted a trickle of gossip and compliments with the half-attentive fluency of a fashionable portrait-painter. Don Alonzo warmed himself at the *brasero*, impatient for the Frenchman's attention. De Tremblaye meantime awaited some signal from don Alonzo before introducing a topic which interested them both much more than the Condesa's face. It was in no spirit of gallantry that De Tremblaye had paid his court to her so assiduously of late. And it had been necessary to 'walk delicately,' lest he should give her or the world the impression that he aspired to be the rival of her formidable lover.

It was not till the work of art was accomplished and the artist had removed his silk handkerchief with a bow and a flourish, that Alonzo decided to say something.

'Pardon me, Monsieur, but you may be interested to hear that the Condesa and I have been speaking of the affair of Velintón's persecution of our family.'

De Tremblaye, suddenly alert, held up an admonishing finger, then pointed it towards the door.

'Do your doors ever sprout ears, Madame?' he asked - 'Like this?' - and put his hands on each side of his head, simulating a pair of long attentive ears so drolly that even Alonzo could not but laugh.

'Naturally they do, Señor,' replied Ismena. 'Those poor creatures of God outside need something to amuse them as much as ourselves.'

He stepped softly to the door, opened it, looked out and closed it again. *

THE SPANISH LADY

'For the moment,' he said, 'it seems the Good God has found amusement for His creatures elsewhere. Probably supper. So let us talk.'

'*Si, Señor!* Let us talk!' echoed Alonzo, rising from the faded gilt arm-chair in which he was seated. 'Time is money, as these accursed *Rubios* say. The Condesa assures me that, incredible as it may appear, Velintòn is ignorant of her relationship to the Marquès de la Peña and myself.'

'Incredible indeed!' ejaculated De Tremblaye. 'Yet anything else is equally incredible. Every one knows that this Milord, this man made of steel, has softened to wax in the light of a certain pair of Spanish eyes. That appears a miracle until one looks into those eyes oneself.'

He detached a small mirror from the wall and held it near the candles.

'Look here, Madame, and see your own beauty in its perfection.'

Ismena surveyed her image in the glass with a naïve delight.

'The rouge is indeed lovely! A thousand thanks, Monsieur. You have arranged me to a marvel.'

She laughed with pleasure. Then throwing her fan open and her sparkling smile to right and left —

'*Cá, Señores!* The tiresome Lord shall be taught a lesson this evening. I will make him pay for giving all this uneasiness to my own dear father and my good brother here.'

'Who could refuse anything that the Condesa de

THE SPANISH LADY

Careno asked?' returned De Tremblaye. 'Not even Velintòn. He will promise you everything, the head of King George himself if you exact it.'

Dofia Pilar appeared in the doorway.

'*Mona mia*, the coach has been already some time at the door.'

'And if I arrive late at the ball I shall put El Lord in a difficult temper, just when I want him to be amiable. What a funny man!' exclaimed Ismena. 'Yes – yes, *amighita*! I am ready – I really am. You will not come in my carriage, Monsieur? No? – *Bueno, bueno*, Pilar! – I shall see you at the ball. *Hasta la vista*, Señores.'

Pilar, busy meantime enveloping Ismena in a warm fur-trimmed pelisse, drew her out of the room, which was the darker for her vanishing.

CHAPTER II

DE TREMBLAYE wiped the rouge from his fingers delicately with his silk handkerchief. Alonzo now looked all satisfaction. He assumed a superior air.

'So, Monsieur, we need trouble ourselves no further about this affair. I am infinitely obliged for your friendly interest in the matter. I shall not forget it. My sister will speak to El Lord this evening and we shall hear no more about this mad business.'

'You think not?' questioned De Tremblaye.

He took out a long *cigarillo* and lighted it at one of the wax candles. The mask of smiling gallantry had dropped from his face. He smiled certainly as he spoke, but his smile was more crooked than before and slightly ironic.

'*Que crees, amigo?*' Alonzo on his side interrogated. 'Velintòn is after all a gentleman. He cannot refuse such a request from a lady.'

'From so enchanting a lady,' added De Tremblaye, 'and one of whom he is so much enamoured.'

But he shrugged his shoulders.

'I render thanks to the Holy Virgin of the Atocña and to San Alonzo, who have come to our aid in a truly wonderful manner,' said Alonzo, crossing himself devoutly and kissing his thumb. 'My father will not fail to offer the new mantle to the Virgin, nor I the candles I promised to San Alonzo.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'If I were you I would wait a bit before doing that,' remarked De Tremblaye, puffing at his *cigarillo*.

'What do you mean, Señor?' asked don Alonzo, eyeing him coldly. 'I allow no French impiety in my presence.'

The Frenchman surveyed him with that faint ironic smile. The proud air of the hidalgos, his great ancestors, sat as quaintly on don Alonzo's small person as their armour, their doublet and hose would have done.

'Are you quite certain,' asked De Tremblaye, 'that Veljintón, who has already formulated his accusation before the members of the Regency, will withdraw it at the request of a lady?'

Don Alonzo was vexed.

'I repeat,' he said, taking snuff, 'that El Lord is a gentleman. I regard the matter as settled. It was fortunate I arrived on the scene, for my poor sister — as you have seen — she is positively a child. I will go at once to inform my cousins, the Marquès de Montespínosa, Colonel don Diego and the Abbé, of this happy release from our anxieties. They are staying very privately in the neighbourhood, with other members of our family and noble persons threatened by this mad Englishman. In fact they embarked upon a South American ship at Lisbon, thinking they could better conceal their presence here on board it than on land.'

'Colonel don Diego de la Peña is a brave, a

THE SPANISH LADY

determined man,' said De Tremblaye. 'I esteem him.'

'There will now be no necessity for them to remain in so uncomfortable a situation,' continued don Alonzo. 'The La Peñas and other hidalgos involved in this stupid business, owe you much, Monsieur, for the prompt information which you gave us. I assure you I shall not forget your services.'

Dòn Alonzo swelled with importance as Conde de la Peña and still more as brother of the enchanting Condesa de Careno, she who had brought to her feet the Hero of Salamanca.

De Tremblaye's voice was naturally harsh. Aware of this, he had trained it to be soft and low, but sometimes its original quality reasserted itself. It did so now.

'I can do you yet another service, Señor Conde. I can inform you that certain malicious persons have reported to the English authorities that you are not to be trusted, that you are intriguing with the *afrancesados*.'

Watching don Alonzo's face, which was in the full light of six wax candles, De Tremblaye saw it quiver and turn grey under its paint.

'Have they any evidence?' asked don Alonzo after a slight pause. And answered himself—'No, they cannot have.'

'You are right—they have only strong suspicions.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Colour and confidence returned gradually to don Alonzo's face, as he reassured himself. 'I have in fact done nothing – a few hasty expressions – some careless talk. Why not? Every one hates the *Rubios* except a few members of the Cortes, who are doubtless well paid for supporting them. Under any circumstances' – his voice rose triumphant – 'the English will not now dare to accuse me.'

'Of course not!' De Tremblaye's tones were soft again. 'But how if the public suspects you? Your crowd does not wait for evidence. A boy of fifteen denounces you, and hey presto! you find yourself being dragged through the streets face downwards. They are not well paved, the streets of Cadiz.'

'Reserve your anxiety for yourself, Monsieur,' replied Alonzo haughtily. 'I have no fear.'

De Tremblaye took up his hat, preparing to depart.

'You forget, *amigo*,' he replied mockingly, 'I am a *Rubio* myself. I am under the protection of the British Flag.'

Don Alonzo, also moving towards the door, threw the end of his cloak over his shoulder with Roman dignity.

'And you, *Señor*,' he said, 'forget that *we* are under the protection of Lord Velinton himself.'

CHAPTER III

IN the city of Cadiz a large house was standing empty. Its wealthy owners had deserted it on the first approach of the French, and fled to their estates in South America. When Lord Wellington proposed giving a ball in honour of the Cortes, then sitting in Cadiz, he was permitted to use this house for the purpose, his own quarters being much encumbered. It had suffered some pillage and neglect, but there was still handsome furniture left in it. The caretaker had not neglected the palms and orange-trees which filled the middle of the *patio*, and British soldiers, who dearly love decorating, had hung them with coloured lights for the festival. They had also scrubbed and polished the floors and put up gay trophies of flags between the dark old tapestries and pictures, which, according to them, were calculated to 'give anyone the blues or scare 'em into fits.' There were no passages in the house, except for the gallery round the *patio*, the rooms communicating with each other by folding doors. On either side of the spacious ball-room, lighted by immense crystal chandeliers, such doors, set wide open, led into a smaller salon. Here gathered those who were resting from the dance and those who were merely spectators of it. Elsewhere non-dancing guests crowded to the card-tables. Enslaved by the cruelty or the kindness of the cards, they took no interest in the drama of the ball. A large ball is

THE SPANISH LADY

always likely to have its little dramas. A ball in wintertime is sure to have them. This evening the scene was set for a scene in one which was already interesting many of the guests. The chief actor in it was the Commander-in-Chief of the English and Spanish Armies, Lord Wellington.

The ball-room acted as a strait between the two nations, although there were adventurous individuals who traversed it and made an excursion or a settlement on the alien side. In one salon were the members of the Cortes and the officers of the Spanish garrison with their wives and daughters, the nobility and official dignitaries of the two cities of Cadiz, San Fernando and the neighbourhood. Opposite them were the British officers and other officials, with their wives. These were comparatively few. Their ladies were fewer, since only those possessed of money and influential connections were able to bring over their wives to enjoy with them the Southern winter, which was stormy enough in the interior of the country to keep the armies idle. It may be guessed that such wives were for the most part handsome, well-bred and well-dressed. With their tall slenderness, their dazzling shoulders, bright hair and innocent blue eyes, they were no negligible rivals to the pretty Andalusians, the dark fire of whose Oriental eyes shone on them critically from the opposite doorway. Some of these, however, had come to closer quarters with their blonde rivals, migrating to the English side to capture their share

THE SPANISH LADY

of the superfluous males. Brand-new British uniforms, newly brought from London, struck their scarlet trumpet-note against the dark tapestry of the walls; gold epaulets, braids and tassels, jewelled Orders, glittered and flashed in the light of the great girandoles. Other British uniforms there were whose bravery was of another nature. They had weathered the fires and the rains of battle and of mountain storms among the Northern Sierras. Even these, skilfully mended, cleaned and pressed, had a soldierly smartness wanting to the gayer uniforms of the Spanish officers.

Some of the Spanish ladies were seated formally, each with her cavalier behind her chair. Others overflowed into the ball-room, to watch or join in the dances. Through all these groups there was passing at the moment a very lively thrill. They were being shocked, unspeakably and deliciously shocked.

Two Hanoverian officers started it, with two ladies from London. One by one, half a dozen other couples followed suit. There they were, these shameless ones, clasped in each other's arms, revolving slowly yet giddily under the central chandelier, to the slow, almost plaintive, strains of a German folk-melody.

Behind the Spanish fans there were muffled explosions of giggles, exclamations.

'Hija mia! I would rather die - !'

'Maria purissima!'

'Mujer! One cannot believe one's eyes!'

THE SPANISH LADY

'*Gesù, Maria y José!* What these foreigners dare to do!'

Every popular Virgin and Saint in the Calendar was invoked to witness this most indecent performance. And it was the English, the stiff, cold, prudish *Rubios*, who were the actors in the amazing scene. What hypocrites! The gentlemen agreed with the ladies up to a certain point. It was not a dance which any Spanish *caballero* would dream of permitting his wife or daughter to dance. It would never be permitted in the best houses. But their silent or whispered view of the matter was, that they would not object to practising the dance themselves, if they might have their choice of partners among the women dancers. There was that light-footed little cousin of El Lord's, for example. It was true that even Englishmen considered her manners shocking in a young girl — but after all she was not much worse than other young English ladies, very pretty and, it was said, fabulously rich. These *caballeros* did not notice the blond young officer with whom the girl was so lightly footing it. But the ladies atoned for their want of appreciation. The first explosion of horror over, the lively Andalusians amused themselves vastly at the expense of the less expert dancers, of whom a few gradually ventured into the circle.

'Look at the fat fellow with the bald head! He is going to fall — look, look, *Señoras!* His partner tries to hold him up — No — he has gone.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'It is Concha's admirer. Won't you go and pick him up, Concha?'

'No, Señora! Not since he has forsaken me for that red-headed Miss, with long feet. *Dios mio!* Doesn't he look like a great bull-frog, sprawling on the floor?'

'There is the handsome Captain who is in love with Dolores. Don't you feel jealous, Dolores, when you see him embracing that fine woman?'

Dña Dolores laughed and tossed her head. 'No, *per Dios!* I pity him. She must be very heavy to carry round the room.'

'*Hija mia!* Your Captain really is a handsome man. *Un guapo!* But assuredly many of these Englishmen are very handsome—even some of the common soldiers. There is a sergeant—'

A mature aristocrat in powder raised his voice in protest.

'Señorita *mia!* Is it possible that I hear a well-bred Spanish woman describe these drunken heretic boors as handsome?'

A subdued chorus of male voices approved the utterance.

'My dears!' laughed Dolores, 'I believe these gentlemen do us the honour to be jealous of our English friends.'

A chorus of teasing feminine voices drove home the accusation.

An indignant young man protested against it.

'You do us wrong, Señoras. One could as soon

THE SPANISH LADY

be jealous of the oxen whose red flesh makes their stolid faces its own horrible colour.'

The discussion was gathering heat when doña Concha cleverly effected a diversion.

'What in the name of God is that?' she asked, pointing to the feminine half of a couple which had just joined the circle.

'It is Velintòn in disguise,' replied doña Dolores.

The description was unjust to the Commander-in-Chief, but it was near enough to the fact to provoke laughter. The object of this mirth did not notice it and would not have cared if she had. Lady Jane Gervase was related to the great man and bore a recognizable resemblance to him, though the lady was the bigger and more rough-hewn of the two. Her nose was as large, her grey eyes almost as keen as his, but more genial in their regard, and there was not an officer in the army more hard-bitten and weather-beaten in face and form than Lady Jane. But whereas her cousin Arthur Wellesley had in his youth earned the nickname of The Beau, Lady Jane had a genius for buying the wrong clothes, putting them on the wrong way and more or less fatally damaging them before they had been long on her back. At the particular moment when she was providing amusement for Lord Wellington's Spanish guests, her green satin turban, with its high diamond aigrette, had slipped to one side, letting several wisps of greyish hair stray down her neck. Her green satin dress was elaborately trimmed

THE SPANISH LADY

with gold military braid and fringe, and in spite of being quite as short as the fashion demanded, a yard of braid had somehow been torn from the skirt and was hanging about her feet. This partly, if not quite, accounted for the agonized expression of the young A.D.C. whom she held in her grasp. He was aware of the dangling snare and that it had but to drop a few inches lower, to catch his partner's feet or his own. The absurdity of their appearance would be consummated when they were both prostrate on the floor, for he had no hope of being able to hold up Lady Jane. He could only tell her with the firmness proper to an A.D.C. of their imminent danger. Rapt in the pleasure of her peculiar dance—for she did not so much waltz as stride round the room—and humming the tune of the German folk-song well and truly, her ladyship took a half turn round the dancing circle before she realized what he had said. Then stopping short suddenly, to the confusion of her partner and a couple behind her, she slipped her hand through the loop of braid and with the cheerful observation that 'that would do,' prepared to start again. The lifted skirt revealed too much of an unornamental petticoat and a plain useful leg. The time had come for the A.D.C. to assert himself.

'No, no—we must get that braid mended before we go on, Lady Jane,' he said authoritatively; and led her, unexpectedly meek, into a corner of the English salon. It was a secluded corner, where an

THE SPANISH LADY

elderly Colonel was taking a doze on a settee against the wall. The A.D.C. planted her on the other end of the settee.

'Now I'll go and send for your maid,' he said. 'I suppose she's somewhere near.'

'Bless the boy!' exclaimed Lady Jane. 'Does he think I drag a tiresome female about at my heels? God forbid! But I'll be obleeged to you, young man, if you'll fetch my Orderly. Don't get up, Morgan' – for Colonel Morgan was now awake and about to rise – 'sit down by me and have a chat. By Gad! I'm as hot as though I'd been galloping after Arthur and his foxhounds! Lend me your hat a minute, there's a good man!'

The Colonel, whom nothing from Lady Jane could surprise, handed her his hat. Taking it in both hands, she leaned back against the wall and fanned herself vigorously.

Two young Spanish ladies, engaged in giving lessons in Castilian to a group of good-looking subalterns, stared at her in amazement. Then putting their pretty heads together, suffered convulsions of suppressed laughter behind their fans.

'Whbm did you say I was to fetch, Lady Jane?' asked the A.D.C., vexed at her behaviour.

'My Orderly – one of Lord Wellington's that he's lent to me. Corporal Marsland – that's his name – 25th Regiment, first battalion. He's about somewhere.'

Colonel Morgan came to the A.D.C.'s assistance.

THE SPANISH LADY

'I saw him in the *patio* not long ago,' he said, 'sewing a button on your ladyship's cloak, much more firmly than a maid would have done, I don't doubt.'

The A.D.C. went swiftly in search of Marsland.

'I can't bear women about me,' Lady Jane continued, still fanning herself. 'Of course Englishmen aren't near so handy as Indians, but I'd sooner have an Englishman than a lady's-maid, with her headaches and her love-affairs and her hysterics.'

'A Corporal in the 25th may be warranted free from headaches and hysterics,' returned the Colonel. 'But as to love-affairs — hm, hm.'

'Oh that's quite different!' she declared. 'Of course he might marry one of these natives, or a comrade's widow with half a dozen children. But I've taken care that shan't happen. I've arranged an engagement between him and the maid people insisted on my niece bringing with her. She's a good-looking woman of a sensible age, and I warrant she'll keep an eye on Marsland.'

'Why, by God, there's Picton!' exclaimed Colonel Morgan.

A tall, battered-looking man in a battered uniform was walking slowly through the room. As he came he was looking round him with no very amiable expression.

'Like a bear with a sore head, as usual,' Lady Jane commented, leaning forward and taking a good look at the distinguished General. 'I thought he never came within fifty miles of Wellington.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'That's true enough as a rule,' rejoined the Colonel. 'He was to have sailed for England some weeks ago but he caught a fever just before going abroad and has been invalided at Seville ever since. He's just leaving for home — though I don't doubt Lord Wellington will have him back before the spring. We all know they don't like each other very well, but your cousin's too great a man not to recognize what Picton's worth to the Army.'

Here Lady Jane's attention was diverted by the appearance of a thick-built, ruddy soldier, admirably stiff, neat and clean. He had a stolidity of countenance and manner which perhaps conveniently belied his intelligence. He stood to attention with a box in his hand, and saluted with extreme correctness.

'That's right, Marsland. Stitch this braid on for me. Some fool's caught his sword in it, and another's torn my dress half off my back with his cuff. And look here, Marsland, the strap of my sandal's coming loose.'

She cocked up, unabashed, a foot and ankle better suited to a cavalry boot than to the white silk stockings and green satin slippers which actually adorned them.

Marsland, obedient to command, squatted tailor-fashion on the floor and taking his implements out of the box, set to work rapidly to stitch on the torn braid. His indifference was apparently as complete as Lady Jane's to the quizzical glances cast in their direction.

THE SPANISH LADY

The salon, a corner of which they occupied, was now refilled with the returning dancers, who had finished their sensational performance. The polished floor of the big ball-room was empty, except for groups of people along the walls. Then from a door at the far end, there entered a young girl in white, save for a narrow pale blue ribbon sash tied high up under her arms. A solitary figure, small, almost a child she looked, tripping across the wide empty floor. Light-footed she came, now hesitating, now advancing, like a bird on a lawn. Birdlike she turned her shining brown head this way and that, looking for some one, with bright-glancing hazel eyes. The people round the ball-room were all looking at her.

'*Qué mona! Qué bonita!*' murmured the Spanish ladies.

'But, my dear! Such a young girl – and without a *duesña!* These English!'

'Do you know who she is? She is a niece of Velintón's and immensely rich.'

'*Vamos, Duquesa!*' – this to a somnolent matron – 'you know El Lord. You must try to marry her to your son.'

'*Santa Maria purissima!* Marry my son to a heretic and a girl with no education! *Gesù!* Without even a *duesña!*'

The young girl, not seeing the person whom she sought, flitted across the ball-room to the English side. There she shortly discovered the group of

THE SPANISH LADY

Lady Jane, Colonel Morgan and Marsland. She was perhaps not so childlike as she appeared. When she came upon Lady Jane she struck the small ivory fan which she carried in her little mittened right hand, on the palm of her left, and exclaimed as one relieved of a great anxiety:

'There you are, Cousin Jane! I've been looking for you everywhere.'

Lady Jane, seated sideways on the settee for the convenience of Marsland, was deep in Indian reminiscences with Colonel Morgan. At the sound of Ellen's voice she turned round so suddenly that Marsland's long needle pricked her severely. Between the prick of the needle and that of her conscience, she could make no immediate reply but a grimace.

'You can't think what a sad sight it's been, Colonel Morgan,' the artful girl continued. 'A poor orphan girl hunting all over the house for her chaperon! I'm sure you'd have cried if you'd seen her.'

'But I did see her,' returned the Colonel with a chuckle.

Ellen coloured slightly. Meantime Lady Jane was crying out:

'Oh Lord and the dickens, Ellen! I'd clean forgotten about you. The fact is, Morgan, this child's poor dear father did a ridiculous thing in leaving her in my charge. I could teach a squad of recruits their drill a deal better than I shall ever be able to teach manners to a young lady.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'You see Papa knew I simply couldn't learn them, at my age,' returned the child, gravely shaking her head.

'I'll teach you the proper behaviour for a young Miss,' said the Colonel, who had risen from his place on the settee. 'Sit down here by your chaperon, Miss Ashby, look at the tips of your little toes and find yourself too fatigued to dance with anyone until a really desirable partner asks for the honour — a peer's son, or a wealthy nabob's, or a grandee of Spain. On no account so much as look at subalterns in the Light Brigade. My poor young lady! I am sure the Lord Chancellor would have cried had he seen you seeking for your chaperon this evening.'

He shook his finger half-playfully, half-seriously at Ellen, who was by this time blushing her best.

'Yes, yes, Ellen,' Lady Jane chimed in hastily, as the Colonel drifted away to a group of officers, 'Morgan's quite right. Sit down here, my girl, beside me. Eyes front and attend to the regulations.'

Ellen sat down and tried to look like the young ladies she had seen at Bath. She drooped the long lashes over her bright eyes and buttoned up her little pink mouth very seriously.

Lady Jane was attending to Marsland and the strap of her shoe.

'Will that hold, Marsland?' she asked, stamping her foot.

'Can't say, your ladyship,' replied Marsland.

THE SPANISH LADY

'The last shoe you mended for me burst out in a week.'

'Your ladyship needs to be shod with iron,' he rejoined very respectfully; and was surprised when Lady Jane's short barking laugh followed his remark.

'Now fasten up my dress,' she continued, turning her back towards him, 'and don't forget to bite the hooks. What are those damfools giggling about, I should like to know? Do they think I can go about all the evening with a hank of braid round my heels and my dress open at the back!'

His task accomplished, Marsland retired with his box to the *patio*, there to smoke a *cigarillo*. 'A rum old girl!' he thought, as he lighted it, 'but a thoroughbred 'un all the same. And if she don't mind the natives making game of her and me, why should I?'

No sooner was Marsland out of earshot than Lady Jane turned to Ellen with what was intended to be a terrible look.

'Now, you monkey, what was Morgan saying to you? I suppose you've been off somewhere with Harry Beaumont?'

'I only danced once with him. You said I might.'

'Dance! You weren't dancing when I was. Where were you, Miss?'

'We went away and sat out a little, because I was tired.'

'Tired!' snorted Lady Jane. 'That won't do, my

THE SPANISH LADY

girl. Why, I've known you run seven miles after the Beagles. I'll be bound Master Harry begged a kiss.'

'Oh no, Cousin Jane!'

This was said with such emphasis that Lady Jane felt relieved.

'That's right, my girl!' she ejaculated. 'That's right!'

The demure young lady's eyelids were lifted and she looked her chaperon in the face. Her smile was naughty; but she had a delightful dimple.

'I mean he didn't beg. He just kissed me.'

After this shameful avowal the two ladies remained a few seconds looking each other in the eyes. Lady Jane tried to frown; instead, she broke into a short yell of laughter.

'Upon my word, Ellen! You are a little devil!'

Ellen snuggled closer, with her soft arm against Lady Jane's large bony one.

'We were only having some fun. Really! — We found an empty room and we played at being in the schoolroom at Morningfold. Harry only kissed me once. He said he oughtn't.'

'He was quite right.' Lady Jane had become stern again. 'What would the Lord Chancellor say to it, I should like to know?'

'Kissing's not his business, anyhow,' returned Ellen. 'Only marrying.' She sighed plaintively. 'Silly old man, isn't he? It wouldn't matter so much if we were all peacefully at home. I should simply

THE SPANISH LADY

wait till I was twenty-one. But, oh darling Cousin Jane! Just think! Harry might be killed any day without our ever having been married or even properly engaged.'

Lady Jane shook herself and spoke roughly.

'You don't need to say that to a soldier's wife. I can tell you it an't a bit better because you're married. There 'tis. We've got to put up with it. As to you and that lad of yours - it's been a job getting the Lord Chancellor's permission to bring you abroad, and I believe I'm acting wrong in allowing you to meet young Beaumont here. Your godpapa's been giving me a talking to about it. It's a great honour, Ellen, to be Arthur Wellesley's godchild.'

'Yes, I know that, but -'

'He don't like your having what he calls an unfortunate entanglement at your age and with your fortune.'

Ellen went rather pale. 'But Cousin Arthur doesn't understand. He's never troubled about me before.'

'He's been too busy to think about little girls. And he hadn't seen you since you were a child. Says he didn't realize how much money that uncle of yours had left you or how pretty you'd grown. Not that looks matter. He's got very high notions for you, my girl, and you ought to feel vastly honoured at your Cousin Arthur giving a thought to your prospects when he's got all he has on his mind.'

A big nose is said to indicate a determined dis-

THE SPANISH LADY

position. Ellen's nose was small. But there was something about the set of her pink underlip at this moment, which suggested that in just one infinitesimally small encounter of wills, the great man with the famous nose might meet his match.

CHAPTER IV

LORD WELLINGTON had condemned Ellen's little love-affair. He himself stood accused of one much more deplorable. Among the small groups of British officers standing about in the ball-room, gossip passed whispering. 'The Peer,' it said, was lingering at Cadiz. It was true that the Cortes was sitting there, but now that Lord Wellington was Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish as well as of the British and Portuguese Armies, there was no need for him to trouble so much about the Cortes. It was rumoured that he had omitted to answer several unimportant letters. A trifle were anyone else concerned; a portent in Wellington. Gossip whispering lower, affirmed that the Commander-in-Chief had been recognized, muffled in his cloak, riding out of the Landgate after dark and quite alone. What insanity! He had enemies even in the Cortes, not to mention French spies. The Isthmus was not considered a safe place for anyone to traverse alone at night. There were too many gipsies and refugees about, real or pretended. And then this Cleopatra of their English Anthony's belonged to a family of doubtful loyalty, who might well be using her charms for political purposes. There was a strange atmosphere of impatience and doubt in the circle closest to the Great Man. The unexpected appearance of Picton added to the sense of the unusual. He was invaluable to his Chief in the

THE SPANISH LADY

field, but the two never met when they could 'avoid it.'

Picton stood alone, just inside the ball-room. Some of the Spaniards were performing a graceful Andalusian dance to the music of a species of bag-pipe and the clash of castanets. A younger officer approached him.

'By Gad, Stuart!' ejaculated the General, 'what the devil are we all doing, standing here watching these natives ballet-dance?'

The younger man smiled.

'You'd rather be making a French *corps de ballet* dance, sir, wouldn't you? With Marshal Soult capering at their head.'

Picton grinned.

'I wager I'd pipe 'em a better tune than that, sir. Damned stuff, ain't it? Like the yowling of a love-sick cat. Good enough for these hidalgos to figure to, I dare say, but give me a Welsh jig.'

Colonel Vandeleur strolled up and greeted Picton.

'Glad to see you're off the sick-list, sir. But I wish you'd just landed here, instead of being, as I understand, sailing for England to-morrow.'

'Not much use my staying, Vandeleur,' grumbled Picton. 'I might feel tempted to give up my leave if there were any prospect of things moving. The men have forgotten their troubles – even the damned injustice of the Peer's General Order. Damned injustice, I say! Good lads! They're ready to march anywhere and fight anyone. But they won't be as

THE SPANISH LADY

prime when they've been kept kicking their heels a month or two more in cantonments. Has Wellington dropped any hint yet as to the spring campaign, Stuart?

'No —' replied Stuart slowly. He paused and continued with a ring of insincerity in his voice: 'Lord Wellington is detained here by an affair at the Cortes. He is trying to induce the Regency to take proceedings against some of these peculating Spanish hidalgos who rob the Army.'

'The more fool he,' retorted Picton. 'He might as well try to take proceedings against the fleas. I've given up worrying about the performances of Spanish vermin of any kind. I just scratch myself and go on with my business. But I'll tell you this, Van. I hate my men being kept in cantonments in this infernal country a day longer than they need be. There's too much wine about and too many pretty women.'

'Pretty women!' repeated Vandeleur. 'Ay, the deuce there are! One too many at any rate.' He smiled meaningly at Stuart, who made no response.

A silence fell on the clatter of tongues. The ball-room floor, which had been invaded by groups and strolling couples, was suddenly clear. Round its shining emptiness the company sat or stood. A black-coated musician sat on a stool, one leg cocked up across the other knee, to support a guitar. He tuned it and began a thin sweet tune, half-lively, half-languishing. But it was not his tune which induced



THE SPANISH LADY

the silence: it was such a silence as sometimes falls on a buzzing room at the entrance of a Royalty or of a strikingly beautiful woman.

The Condesa de Careno floated into the centre of the open space. Her flame-coloured dress clung close, her arms were lifted above her head, and extended between them she held an embroidered black scarf. She was to dance that Spanish shawl-dance the memory of which lingered long with the generation of English who had found it blossoming like a flower in the black country of War.

Now the flame-coloured vision flitted, floated hither and thither, light as a blown leaf on the wind, alive and capricious as a butterfly. A dimly bright flame-coloured reflection followed it over the polished floor. The silence was only broken by discreet murmurs and exclamations of admiration. Picton, after a prolonged stare, blew – ‘Whew!’ – through his teeth.

‘She’s a stunner, Van, and no mistake – who is she?’

‘You positively don’t know? By Gad! I wish there were more people in this room who could say the same,’ Stuart commented bitterly. ‘I heard those damned Spaniards over there cutting their jokes over it only a few minutes ago.’

‘Of course they were,’ returned Vandeleur. ‘Everybody does. It’s strange you shouldn’t have heard anything, Sir Thomas.’

Picton shrugged his shoulders.

THE SPANISH LADY

'You forget. I've been down with a fever at Seville more weeks than I want to count, and have a law-suit at home to worry me besides.'

His eyes were following the Condesa. Vandeleur's and Stuart's marked something else. At the farther end of the ball-room a curtain hung over a small doorway. Someone was holding it aside with uplifted hand. Motionless as bronze he stood, his intent eyes following the dancer's every movement. This someone was a trim upright figure, his breast blazing with Orders. The strong, eagle face was pleasantly ruddy and bore none of those deep lines of care and anxiety which might have been expected to mark the face of the Commander-in-Chief. Yet something beside the silver hair at the temples, perhaps its thinness and expression of steely concentration, usually robbed it of all appearance of youth. To-night it was transformed. The eyes were no longer cold and keen; they were fixed upon Ismena de Careno with the ardent and tender gaze of a young lover, unconscious of the presence, of the existence of any human being save the object of his passion.

'See Lord Wellington?' asked Vandeleur.

His hand grasped Picton's massive shoulder, his eyes indicated the half-curtained doorway.

'I see him well enough,' returned Picton. 'But what's the matter? Do you wish me to understand the sight of my ugly mug's keeping the Peer out of the ball-room?'

'No, no! But if you look at him and look at that

THE SPANISH LADY

woman dancing, you'll see what all this gossip's about.'

Picton grinned.

'After a petticoat, is he? Nothing new in that. But he don't usually take much notice of 'em when he's got any business on hand.'

'No — not usually,' replied Vandeleur slowly. After a pause he continued with some hesitation: 'Is it your opinion that it's about time we knew something of our plan of campaign, began to make preparations for striking —'

Picton turned round sharply.

'Am I a dam' fool? If we don't move early we shall get the devil of a licking this spring somewhere between Medina and Salamanca. The French are displaying a good deal of activity there already.'

'Quite so. But nobody, not even Fitzroy Somerset, can find out whether the Chief has got any plan prepared, or even whether he believes these reports of Bonaparte's reverses in Russia. We are — in some perplexity.'

'You ain't insinuating that I should offer the Peer my advice?' grinned Picton. 'Thank you for nothing, Van! I know his lordship's infernal temper too well, and he hates me like the devil.'

'There's no one he values more in the field,' returned Vandeleur diplomatically. 'But the position's damned puzzling. We all agree that the Peer is now more wanted in other places than in Cadiz. Yet here he is. And we all believe, rightly or

THE SPANISH LADY

wrongly, that the Spanish lady yonder accounts for it.'

Picton answered gravely.

'I've never been over-fond of Wellington. There's not a more unjust man in Christendom. But fair's fair, and he'd see himself damned before he permitted a woman to stand between him and his duty. You can take that from me.'

The two officers standing by Sir Thomas Picton were not the only ones to throw disquieted glances in the direction of the Commander-in-Chief. At a little distance from them stood two in handsome uniforms, of which the more gorgeous was Spanish. One was Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Lord Wellington's nephew and valued Aide-de-Camp. Lord Fitzroy was shaved, shod and uniformed with a meticulous care surpassing, if possible, his Chief's. He was handsome and quite young. Nevertheless some lines of care already began to appear on his forehead. The other man was the Conde de Alava, the Spanish *liaison* officer, as we should say, attached to the British Headquarters. Older and less handsome than Somerset, he had yet greater charm. He had the charm, the dignified grace and courtesy of his race, combined with a good sense and honesty conspicuously wanting in most of the Spanish governing class of the time. Alava was the only Spaniard on terms of real friendship with Wellington.

'Lord Wellington's as slippery as an eel this evening,' Somerset complained, in a low voice. 'I've been

THE SPANISH LADY

quite unable to get hold of him. I wish to God he hadn't insisted on giving this ball. I've a whole bundle of papers waiting for him, and can't get to work until he has glanced through them.'

'He is there. You are afraid to speak to him?' asked Alava in his gentle voice, with his foreign accent.

Somerset hesitated a moment; then —

'I am,' he said.

'I understand it,' replied Alava.

There was another pause. Then Alava said:

'Yet it must be that something be done.'

Somerset shrugged his shoulders.

'Listen, *amigo*,' Alava continued, speaking earnestly and low. 'You English fear only the delay, the neglect of affairs. I fear more. During my last absence our great Lord has laid his hand on a nest of vipers. He has attacked some of our highest nobility, men with relations everywhere, very strong, very proud. Will not they and all their friends be very angry? It is clear. When I return, what do I find? Our Hero is in the arms of a Cleopatra who is the daughter of one of his victims, the sister of another. *Caracoles!* You English are sometimes not clever! How can it be you ignore that the Condesa doña Ismena de Careno is also a La Peña?'

'Is that really so?' asked Fitzroy. 'I ought to have found out. But women, you see, have counted so little with Lord Wellington. He met the lady in Madrid last September and seemed much struck by

THE SPANISH LADY

her. Then she was in Lisbon for a short time with some relative who was on a mission there. It was clear he was smitten with her charms. But women – well! With him, they seemed of no importance. It's only since she came to Cadiz that he's shown himself – a bit too fond of this Spanish lady.'

'You did not think it strange that the Condesa de Careno should sojourn in a seaside villa at this season? To us Spaniards that seems strange.'

'Her poor scarecrow of a husband pretends to be a member of the Cortes, although I believe he is always away, consulting doctors. The Cortes moved here – let's see – when?'

Alava smiled with gentle irony.

'Cortes! The La Peñas do not care two *reales* for the Cortes. They do very naturally expect to receive high office, big salaries, when the most powerful man in Spain becomes the lover of the Marquès de la Peña's beautiful daughter. Imagine then their disappointment, their rage! They were always bad patriots, trying still to keep a place also on the French side. I am told that De Tremblaye has been at doña Ismena's Quinta, painting her portrait. We know that man to be a French spy.'

'He is,' replied Somerset tranquilly. 'He is ours also. We think De Tremblaye is of more value to us than to the French.'

'You think! But the fellow is full of poison. Napoleon begins to understand that the English Lord is a formidable enemy. He has a short way of

THE SPANISH LADY

ridding himself of convenient persons. Or this spy might make use of the 'Lady of the La Peñas' to hold your Lord, while the French make some *coup*.'

'That is unlikely,' replied Somerset coldly. 'The Vicomte de Tremblaye belongs to an *émigré* family, settled in England. Lord Wellington has always treated him with consideration, being sorry for him, as a gentleman obliged to earn his living by playing the spy and the portrait-painter. As to the Condesa de Careno, I don't believe her pretty little head is capable of holding a plan of any kind. Look at her now, ogling that pink-faced boy under Wellington's very nose.'

At this point in her floating dance, doña Ismena certainly did appear to be addressing her seductive movements and enchanting smile to a very blond and very handsome youth who stood in the fringe of spectators round the ball-room. It was the blush suffusing a skin so fair that even the Spanish sun had failed to embrown it, which had called forth Somerset's contemptuous description.

'Who is he?' asked Alava.

'Nobody in particular: I forget his name. A *protégé* of that queer old bird Jane Gervase. You might think old Jane a bit of a fool, but she's not. She's always clever enough to get what she wants for her *protégés*. He was here before Lady Jane and Miss Ashby arrived, or Lord Wellington either. But I've heard that the fair Careno and the youngster were making love like blazes before his lordship's return.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Is it truth! Carambal' exclaimed Alava with sudden animation. 'Then they must be persuaded to make love like blazes once more. This may prove excellent. The very handsome youth may distract doña-Ismena from our noble Lord, as the *torero* with his red cloak distracts the bull from its victim.'

'An excellent game, sir, if young What's-his-name would play it,' replied Somerset, smiling. 'But unluckily he is not likely to. He looks deucedly embarrassed by the lady's attentions.'

'*Per Dios*, he does!' ejaculated Alava. 'Oh you English! What cold-blooded monsters!'

'My sympathies are with the unfortunate youth,' laughed Somerset. 'He has the big nose of the Chief on one side and on the other the bright eyes of the Chief's little goddaughter. It seems there was some juvenile love-affair in that quarter, and seeing what a fortune the girl has, the young man is naturally anxious to keep it going.'

'He is betrothed to Miss Ashby?'

'Oh no! That would not be allowed. He has no pretensions to such a match. And she is a ward in Chancery. But the young lady appears very free and easy, so I dare say the fellow reckons on carrying her off somehow.'

'Lord Fitzroy,' said Alava earnestly, 'I assure you this *amour* of Lord Wellington is yet more serious than you believe. I have reason to think there is danger even to his life in it. But who dare dispute with the Great Man? Neither you nor I. Our best

THE SPANISH LADY

hope is in the caprice, the amorous nature of La Careno. Our Spanish ladies are quick to throw all away for love. Is there no one here with power over that young officer, to persuade him to make love to her again as you say, like blazes?’

‘To persuade him to rush in between the lion and his lamb?’ questioned Somerset. ‘Why, damn it! that’s an idea to make even a Light Bob shiver. However I’ve heard he’s a dare-devil fellow. Crawford lent him to Picton last year, to ride scouting about the enemy’s lines. Picton might say something to induce him to follow up his *amour* with the Condesa. But probably not, for if Wellington found it out, it would certainly dish the fellow’s prospects, if he has any.’

‘My dear friend,’ said Alava, laying his hand on Somerset’s sleeve, ‘I am concerned only with the safety of the Commander-in-Chief.’

‘It is of course very desirable to get Wellington away from his siren,’ replied Somerset. His mental attitude was that he was a complete sceptic as to this precious plot. Alava was an excitable fellow. He, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, knew De Tremblaye well. He was a gentleman.

‘There’s your young man,’ he continued, ‘talking to Lady Jane. I must go and pay my devoirs to her too. Looks like an old war-horse in a turban, doesn’t she? A queer woman to have been put in charge of a young lady. But Miss Ashby herself is not so modest and retiring in her manners as could be wished in —’

THE SPANISH LADY

He strolled away towards the group round Lady Jane without completing his sentence. Alava mentally completed it for him.

'As could be wished in a young lady whose wealth, connections and personal charms would otherwise make her a desirable match for Lord Fitzroy Somerset.'

CHAPTER V

THE Shawl Dance was over. *Bravas* resounded. The British officers clapped vehemently. Doña Ismena stood perfectly still, her beautiful arms hanging down at her sides, the scarf held lightly between her hands. Her dark eyes shone like lamps and under their long lashes, looked straight down the room, but at nothing in particular. Her bosom heaved just perceptibly and her red lips were slightly parted. The smile upon them was less one of gratified vanity than of *joie-de-vivre*, of pleasure in the dance.

As the applause died away, Lord Wellington stepped out into the ball-room: not the ardent, almost youthful lover who had sheltered his delight in the shadow of the curtain, but Lord Wellington, the Commander-in-Chief. He made his compliments to the Condesa de Careno with the formal courtesy which he showed towards all women. Yet as he bent before her, the man behind the mask exulted vehemently in the thought that this exquisite being loved him. Exulted in the knowledge that she was his from the arched instep of her delicate dancing foot to the last strand of silken hair, so fantastically knotted on the crown of her dainty head. To-morrow his fingers should loose that hair and he would bathe his face in its soft scented waves. This exultation was the greater because of the barrier of formality which he set up between himself and Ismena be-

THE SPANISH LADY

fore the world. He believed the world to be ignorant that he was her lover. He the cold, stern Commander of Armies would, he imagined, never be suspected of such a passion as this which now possessed him. It threatened to overwhelm his rational self. He knew that he ought to fear it. Instead he felt an insane joy in its power over him. His love, Ismena's love – that was their precious secret.

Thus did the great man hide his head in the sand, as is the habit of other and less eminent ostriches. But Ismena was no ostrich. She had not the least inclination to be one. The Victor of Salamanca, the Hero, the Deliverer of Spain, the man before whom statesmen and soldiers trembled, bowed himself at her feet. The banal form expressed a reality. Her world knew it, her world saw it. Such moments as these atoned for the boredom of her seclusion at the Quinta. To her the Hero was but a big child who must be humoured, whose game one must play with him. He chose to imagine that people did not know he was her lover, that his cold, stiff manner deceived them. How amusing! She contrived to keep a straight face, but there was a sparkle of mockery in her answering smile which at once alarmed and delighted him. She returned his compliments in her guttural French. Lord Wellington usually preferred to speak French in public, as his years of education in France had taught him to speak it fluently, if not correctly.

'Madame la Comtesse must be fatigued after her

THE SPANISH LADY

exquisite dance,' he said. 'Allow me, Madame, to conduct you to the buffet and offer you a little glass of Oporto.'

'I shall be honoured, indeed, milord,' replied doña Ismena, almost bursting out laughing as she curtsied. 'I will accept a glass of lemonade or of *eau sucrée*, but as your Excellency knows, I do not like the wine of Oporto.'

The crowd which had surged up towards the Condesa, opened before the pair in respectful silence. Savouring her triumph to the utmost, the Enchantress passed along the room, with her slow-swaying Andalusian walk, on the arm of the Conquering Hero. Thus they reached the English salon, through which lay the way to the buffet.

Harry Beaumont had joined the group round Lady Jane. She, engrossed in conversation with some old friends among the officers present, had paid no heed to the little scenes passing in the ball-room. She even momentarily forgot that her Cousin Arthur was reputed to be in love with the Spanish woman. When she saw him with his partner, coming slowly through the salon, his face wearing a particularly amiable expression, it appeared to her to be an excellent opportunity for making Ensign Beaumont known to him. If Arthur saw what a fine promising lad he was, perhaps the judgement passed on her own conduct and Ellen's obstinacy – for Ellen was going to be obstinate – would be less severe. Beckoning to the reluctant Harry, she placed herself in the path of

THE SPANISH LADY

the Lion. She was even prepared to be civil to the 'foreign hussy.'

'I've got a young friend here I want to present to you, Arthur,' she said. 'Ensign Beaumont of the 95th.'

Wellington was usually scrupulously polite to every female thing. Old Jane — called 'old' from her girlhood — was somehow different from other females. He could not 'behave' to her, though he felt for her a real, though rather cross affection. She was to him what to-day would be called 'a good pal,' but she frequently annoyed him; and when she did he did not conceal it.

'What do you want, Jane?' he asked shortly. 'Can't you see I'm engaged.'

The Condesa intervened, speaking French.

'Pray, milord, do me the honour of presenting me to miladi your cousin.'

Wellington, civil but sulky, made the introduction.

Dofia Ismena dropped a beautiful curtsy and smiled an enchanting smile. Lady Jane was not enchanted. She bowed a turbaned head from the nape only. Dofia Ismena now smiled at Ellen, who vaguely aware of something wrong, had tried to slip her arm out of Lady Jane's and retire, but found herself held firmly by the wrist.

'And this,' said dofia Ismena, 'is milord's god-daughter?'

To introduce his young cousin to his mistress was

THE SPANISH LADY

contrary to milord's notions of propriety, but he did so with a better grace than he had shown in effecting his first introduction. Ellen, embarrassed at once by a sense of intrusion and by her admiration of the Condesa de Careno's grace and beauty, looked as blushful and retiring as even Lord Fitzroy could have desired.

'I felicitate milord on his charming goddaughter,' cooed doña Ismena, 'I felicitate Miss a thousand and a thousand times on her illustrious godfather.' Turning to Lady Jane, she added, 'Miladi must be very proud of her niece.'

'She an't my niece, ma'am, but I've no particular reason to be ashamed of her if she were,' returned Lady Jane defiantly, in English. 'Here, Arthur! You make some compliments for me in French. I could jabber away to her in Hindustani, but I'm blest if I can get my tongue round the parlyvoo nowadays.'

'You know you wouldn't make any compliments if you could,' returned Wellington, restored to good-humour, 'so you'd better move out of the way and let us pass. Madame la Comtesse,' he added, 'needs a little rest and a glass of lemonade after her so fatiguing dance.'

Lady Jane drew herself and Ellen aside with dignity.

'As a soldier's wife I hope I know how to obey orders, however uncivilly conveyed. Come, Ellen!'

THE SPANISH LADY

But she could not resist speeding a parting shaft after her cousin.

'No doubt you are sighing for solitude.'

Wellington glanced round at the numerous eyes, discreet but curious, turned in his direction, and grumbled.

'I don't waste my breath sighing for what I can't get. Wherever I go there's sure to be a damned crowd.'

Among the English standing nearest to him, there was a hurried movement to the rear. Harry Beaumont had fled at the first sign of hostilities between Lady Jane and the Commander-in-Chief.

Dofia Ismena, aware of something wrong and fearing herself the cause, turned back gracefully. '*Chère miladi* ! I am quite ashamed. Milord is too amiable. He knows I am easily fatigued, because of my delicate health.'

'What's she talking about?' Lady Jane asked Ellen. 'Delicate health? Delicate fiddlesticks! She means her Spanish laziness.'

Now doña Ismena, leaning on her lover's arm, dropped into her native tongue, so rich in phrases of endearment. Wellington, who had quickly acquired what was needed for official purposes, loved to learn from her lips its amorous vocabulary, but in conversing with her often fell back upon the more familiar French.

Arthur '*mi querido, queridissimo*,' she breathed in his ear — and his iron frame thrilled — 'I do not want

THE SPANISH LADY

that lemonade. Let us find a place where we can be alone.'

Not a line of his face, not a tone of his voice revealed his emotion as he replied:

'But is that possible?'

'Let us see.'

She guided him into an open gallery running round the *patio*. There was a sprinkling of people there; mostly British officers smoking *cigarillos*. Others were passing in and out of a door leading into a card-room. Ismena had explored this region earlier in the evening, when she had planted doña Pilar at a card-table. Attracted by the sound of laughter, she had opened a door leading from the card-room into a small room beyond, and looked in. There she had seen Harry Beaumont balancing some object or other on the end of his chin, while Lord Wellington's god-daughter sprawled on a settee roaring with laughter, more like a boy than a well-bred young lady. Ismena herself would not have been above laughing at Harry's absurd manœuvres and extreme gravity, had she not felt genuinely shocked at the situation. Here was a young girl alone with a gentleman and behaving with no more ceremony, no more reserve than if she had been playing with other young girls. Even English people could not approve of that. Ismena would have been less shocked if the couple had been making love, even ardent love, instead of behaving with this bizarre indecorum. She was too good-natured to reveal Miss Ellen's iniquity to

THE SPANISH LADY

the girl's godfather. But as she guided him in the direction of the place where she had witnessed that spectacle, a prick of jealousy made her ask:

'Is don Hari, the young officer with miladi your cousin, paying court to your pretty goddaughter?'

'Hari? Hari?' repeated Wellington abstractedly. 'There are likely to be a good many officers paying court to Miss Ellen's *beaux yeux* and the *beaux yeux de sa cassette*. But I haven't time to attend to my officers' love-affairs. I haven't time to attend to my own. That's the curse of a situation like ours, *Ismenita de mi cuore*.'

He pulled her arm further through his, and furtively in the dimness of the gallery, pressed her hand against his heart. Such caresses, such little human touches on the part of the Great Man, made Ismena very sorry for him. It distressed her that while he loved her so much, she could love him so little.

'Poor Arthur! Arthur *de mi alma*!' she cooed, caressing his hard hand with her soft one.

Then the urgent business of the evening recurred to her mind.

'My dueña is there in the card-room,' she said, trying to withdraw her arm from his. 'I must see her, speak to her a moment.'

He held her soft arm in a gentle but inflexible grasp.

'I don't want your dueña. She can go to the devil.'

She laughed her low sweet laugh; music in his ears.

THE SPANISH LADY

'But *amighito*, don't you understand? There is a small salon close by, where we can spend a few happy moments if no one interrupts us. It leads out of the card-room and I wish to tell doña Pilar to stand on guard and prevent anyone from coming into it from that side. On the other it must happen as God wills.'

'Go then,' he replied, reluctantly loosing her, 'and return very quickly.'

She slipped away and vanished into the card-room. Wellington stepped to the balustrade and looked up into the night. It was very still. He could just distinguish the rhythmic sigh of Atlantic waves lapping against the quay. A faint aromatic smell arose from some shrub in the *patio* below. Overhead, in the dark fathomless blue, a silver planet swam out from a thin wash of cloud.

'That must be the star of Love,' he said to himself; and immediately smiled at his own folly. 'I'm drivelling like a poet,' he thought. 'God, how I love that woman! It's not safe for a man in my position to love a woman like that — but I'm damned if I know how to avoid it. *Ismenita de mi cuore!*'

He hugged his chains.

'I see you are disengaged, my Lord. Can I have your attention for a moment?'

Thus embodied in the pleasant face and trim figure of Lord Fitzroy Somerset, the hard facts of life broke in upon his dream. The Chief turned on his devoted nephew and Aide-de-Camp.

THE SPANISH LADY

'I don't come to a ball, sir, to talk to my Aide-de-Camp. It's my duty, and yours too, to be civil to the ladies — especially the Spanish ones, who are some of them people of importance.'

'Yes, my Lord — but a courier should leave for Lisbon at dawn to-morrow and I have some papers which need to be looked through and signed by you before I can dispatch them. I have prepared a table for you in the little room yonder, on the other side of the card-room,*where you can sign them.'

'No, sir,' returned Wellington. 'A room leading out of a card-room is too public — a most unsuitable place in which to expose and discuss papers of importance. There is no purpose served by dispatching the courier at so early an hour. Go and dance with the ladies and don't pester me again with your papers.'

'Very well, my Lord.'

Somerset was retiring when he caught sight of the Condesa de Careno coming out of the card-room. He shrugged his shoulders and muttered to himself: 'That woman! Upon my soul it's getting serious.'

Wellington's eyes embraced her as she came. She led him into the *salonito* the Aide-de-Camp had tried to annex. There was the writing-table, set out with wax candles, writing materials, sealing-wax, for solemn business. And there was Ismena.

'At last!' he said, with a great sigh. 'It's terribly hard on a man, Ismena, to have won the love of a

THE SPANISH LADY

woman like you and scarce ever to have a moment in which to enjoy it.'

'It is the price you pay — we pay for your greatness, *querido*,' she answered. '*Ay de mi!* It is true that the hours you give me must be counted.'

'If only I were a subaltern again! It would take a long rosary to count them!'

He caught her in his arms and held her to his breast in silence. Then pressing a long kiss on her cool satin-smooth shoulder, he let her go as abruptly as he had clasped her and took a few paces in the room.

'A fine example I'm setting my officers!' he exclaimed. 'By God, Ismenita! I'd change places with any boy among them, if I could be sure of your love and have leisure to give to it.'

'Do not wish to be anything but your own glorious, heroic self, milord.'

'So you would not love me without my glory, as the French call it?' he asked, stopping before her and frowning a little.

Ismena was not in the least afraid of that frown before which brave men trembled. She glanced at him provokingly over her fan.

'*Quien sabe*, milord?'

'You wouldn't love me if I were only an Ensign?' he asked, forcing a smile, but with anxiety in his voice.

'*Que crees, querido?*' she asked mockingly. Her little white teeth and her bright eyes flashed between

THE SPANISH LADY

the wavings of her fan. And it was the soldier who was afraid. 'How do I know what you would be like if you were a little Ensign? I know what you are now' – and with a delightful suddenness she flung her arms round his neck – 'my Hero! The Saviour of noble and Catholic Spain – the brave, the wise! That is the man I love.'

Her soft hands clung to his neck, her lustrous eyes looked into his. In the light of that look the faint frown of anxiety was smoothed from the great man's brow. His whole being was bathed in beatitude.

'*Creatura de mi alma!*' he murmured; and kissed her rose-red mouth.

Ismena's anxiety was not written on her brow. But she was saying to herself: 'The time is passing, passing, and I have not yet found the opportune moment –'

Wellington spoke in a low voice, unlike his usual abrupt utterances.

'I believe you do love me, Ismenita, and I – I swear I never knew till now what real love meant.'

So he stood silent for a minute or more, with bowed head. Then putting her gently from him and passing his hand over his forehead, he spoke normally, almost playfully.

'In effect, between your Spanish politicians and Bonaparte's marshals, your lover neglects you unpardonably, Condesita. But I promise you I will come to the Quinta to-morrow evening, if it is at all possible.'

THE SPANISH LADY

The moments were slipping away and Ismena's mission had not been fulfilled.

'You will be sure to come?' she asked anxiously.

'I wish I could be sure, *amighita* – but I am not.'

Ismena turned away, pressing a little lace handkerchief to her eyes and trembling with real agitation.

'No, no!' she cried. 'You must not come under my roof, I must not have you. *Santa Virgen de los Dolores perdonadme!*'

'Why not? What is the matter?' he asked, guessing at some Fast Day of the Church or a new Confessor.

'How could I forget him!' she exclaimed. 'My father! My poor father!'

'My dear child! Tell me – have you had some bad news of your father?'

She made a gesture of assent.

'*Ay, ay, de mil!*'

'Poor child! Is he ill? Dying?'

She shook her head, her eyes still buried in her handkerchief.

'Don't cry! You've no idea how it distresses me. Pray tell me your trouble.'

She took the little handkerchief from her eyes, twisted it round her fingers. Her cheeks were pale under Monsieur de Tremblaye's rouge.

'There is a plot to ruin him, the head of one of the noblest Houses in Spain – to bring disgrace on him, on my brother, on all our family.'

'A plot against your father? Who is plotting?'

THE SPANISH LADY

She hesitated a moment, then said:

'His political enemies.'

'These politicians!' exclaimed Wellington. 'They will be at each other's throats, when they ought to be fighting the French. Who are your father's enemies? We'll see that he has justice.'

Ismena was not looking at him, but at the wall opposite to her. Her agitation showed itself only in her dilated eyes and in the movements of her fan.

'Justice! *Pobrecito!* His greatest enemy is the most powerful man in Spain.'

'The most powerful man in Spain?' repeated Wellington. 'Who then?'

'I dare not name him,' she returned in a low voice.

'Child! Not to me?'

'No – not to you, milord.'

He spoke again, with a touch of impatience.

'Can't you rely on me, *Isménita?* Is it the Cardinal Infante, or –'

'No. No.'

'Name him, child! I insist.'

She swung round and looked him in the face.

'The name of my father's enemy?'

'Yes – yes!'

'It is Arthur Lord Velintón.'

The blow was planted fair and square, the battle was opened. Wellington paused, amazed, bewildered.

'I your father's enemy, Ismena? – impossible! What is your father's name?'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Had you troubled to know my own, milord, you must have known it. My father is the Marquès de la Peña.'

Her pride of race spoke in every syllable of the name. Forgetful of manners, Wellington dropped into the chair by the writing-table. He passed his hand over his hair. The light of the wax candles glittered on its silver threads.

'La Peña! Is *he* your father? And your brother – the Conde – I am shocked, I am grieved to hear it.'

Ismena unbent. She was herself again.

'I knew you would be, *mi querido*. My brother would not believe you could be ignorant that I was a daughter of the House of La Peña, but I was sure you did not know whose family you were attacking.'

'Most certainly I was not. If I had known perhaps – yes, I believe I should have stopped it, right or wrong.' He stood up and frowned down at the writing-table. 'I wish to God I had known it sooner, Ismena. But the thing is done now. My memorandum has been sent up to the Regency.'

Ismena spoke with animation.

'*Que crees, amigo?* The de la Peñas may have enemies in the Government, but you have only to speak. They will not dare to oppose you.'

He still looked down, toying with one of Somerset's carefully cut quill pens.

'That's true,' he answered. 'But –'

She waited, perplexed. Why this hesitation?

THE SPANISH LADY

He straightened himself and spoke again. The face he turned on her was no longer that of the lover, but of the Commander-in-Chief. Yet the eyes which sought hers were infinitely kind and distressed.

'I deeply regret it, my treasure,' he said, 'but I cannot do what you wish. It is not only my own reputation which I have to consider, but my duty to my Government, to my country. I cannot interfere now. Your father and brother must stand their trial with the others. If they have been the victims of a plot, you may rest assured it shall be cleared up.'

A wave of amazed indignation sent the blood racing to Ismena's cheeks.

'*Santa Virgen!* Is it possible? You will not do what I ask? You will not save my father, my family, from ruin?'

'I cannot. For God's sake, Ismenita, try to understand. I represent the British Government here. It has sent large sums for the provision of munitions of War for your Spanish Army, for the payment of your soldiers. Your father, together with your brother and other men of rank, are accused of detaining a considerable part of this money for their own benefit.'

Ismena laughed scornfully.

'Do you expect a Marquès de la Peña to keep accounts, like a wretched clerk? *Cà* – you English! Mean! Ungenerous! A nation of shopkeepers, as Napoleon has well called you. *Ave Maria purissima!* Have you no respect, no thought for anything but money – money – money? And you, milord, who

THE SPANISH LADY

call yourself a nobleman —! *Per Dios*, I blush for you, if you cannot blush for yourself.'

Wellington was accustomed to brush aside with contempt such perverse counter-attacks, when they were made by Spanish officers or deputies. In the mouth of Ismena the familiar absurdities stung. His weather-beaten face paled slightly.

'It is hard, it is most infernally hard to refuse you, my dear love. But my duty to my country comes before everything. I cannot sacrifice that to gratify my own feelings, or even yours, Ismenita *de mi alma*.'

His eyes sought hers appealingly. They found no response. This was no longer Ismena, the kind, the ductile. There faced him a woman he did not know — a Latin woman, with the hot vehement anger of the South boiling in her veins, the pride of a long line of grandees lifting her graceful head. For all reply he received an exclamation not usually heard on the lips of ladies and a few violent invocations of saints. But in the silence that followed Ismena with down-cast eyes, nervously handling her fan, was realizing her mistake. It was of no use to batter this iron man with violent words. She must try to subdue her just wrath. She sighed.

'Milord! Arthur! You look so cold, so stern. You frighten me. It is not you, my lover; it cannot be. *Ay de mi!* You hate my father. You hate me. You hate me for being his daughter.'

The agonized bewilderment to which Wellington

THE SPANISH LADY

was a prey, was not written upon his face. That remained cold and unmoved.

'Good God, my child! I hate you? How can you dream of such a thing? As to the Marquès your father, I do not even know him by sight. At the worst he is no worse than the rest. But I had to make an example of some of these men in high places, and as my cursed luck would have it, I pitched on your relations.'

He stood stiff and motionless by the table.

Ismena stepped lightly up to him and clasping her hands around his neck, hid her tearful face on his shoulder.

'But you do love me, Arthur? You do?'

His arm could not but go round her.

He cried out in English, desperately:

'By God! Never loved a woman so much in my life!'

Ismena understood the tone, if not the words. She clung to him, weeping softly.

'You can't, you can't ruin and disgrace my father, my brother. You will stop this dreadful affair, Arthur, *querido*.'

'Ismenita *de mi cuore*! I dare not yield to you. It is impossible.'

'Cruel! Why did I ever love you? You say you love me — No, do not swear it again! If you really loved me you would sacrifice everything, burn all your saints for my sake. But you spurn my prayer, you destroy me, and for what? A wretched affair of

THE SPANISH LADY

pesetas, a thing for tradesmen to quarrel about. *Madre de Dios!* My heart will break. Arthur, I beg, I implore! See! I go down upon my knees.'

She made as though to kneel, but he held her firmly.

'No — no, Ismenita! I could not suffer that. And it would make no difference. I must do my duty. I see you'll never understand. But if you cannot understand my reasons, for God's sake trust me — trust me to do what is right. I must do my duty, at whatever cost to you and to me, too. I beg you, Ismenita, not to torture me by continuing to ask what I cannot grant.'

Ismena put his encircling arms firmly from her. She drew away from him, not again a Fury, but a Great Lady of Spain.

'You speak, milord, of your duty. What of my duty, mine? Have I no duty to my father, to my family, who spring from all the most illustrious blood of Spain? You a foreigner and a heretic, you come here, ignorant of our customs and dare to attack grandees of noble and Catholic Spain because they claim their natural rights. You are very powerful, milord. You may ruin them; but look out for the vengeance which is sure to follow. And Caramba! while you are behaving in this way to my father, you appear to think I shall permit you to be my lover. No, Señor! A thousand times, no.'

Wellington stood quite still, enduring with a stoic pain the beating hail of his mistress' anger. But even

THE SPANISH LADY

thus, suffering as he had not thought a woman could make him suffer, his alert ears caught the sound of English voices without.

'Calm yourself, Ismena,' he said. 'There are people coming in.'

CHAPTER VI

LORD FITZROY SOMERSET was roaming the gallery disconsolate. Towards him came tripping Ellen Ashby, looking about with her pretty birdlike movements. Lord Fitzroy had severe notions of the proprieties for ladies.

'Without a chaperon as usual, the minx!' he said to himself.

'Oh, Lord Fitzroy!' – in a clear treble – 'I am so glad to find you. I want particularly to speak to Lord Wellington, but some one told me he was busy in that little room beyond the card-room. Could you go and ask him whether it's possible for me to see him?'

'Pon honour, Miss Ashby, I'd do anything in reason to oblige you' – and that exactly expressed what he felt at the moment, as he looked into the bright hazel eyes, the pretty innocent face lifted to his. Perhaps after all Miss Ashby was not the bold part Miss people called her: only childish for her age and ignorant of Society. 'But I dare not interrupt his lordship again this evening. He positively hates me already.'

'Oh, Lord Fitzroy! Every one knows how fond he is of you!'

'You are almost irresistibly flattering. But I really dare not do it. I should be sent home by the next ship. My career would be ruined.'

'Then I suppose I must go to Cousin Arthur myself,' said Ellen.

THE SPANISH LADY

Such was Lord Fitzroy's dismay at this proposal, that he actually laid his hand on Miss Ashby's arm — a soft round little arm — though he withdrew it at once.

'Not on any account, Miss Ashby. There's ~~that~~ Ensign in the Rifles who is such a friend of Lady Jane's over there. Send him. The Light Bobs an't afraid to go anywhere, are they?'

Sir Thomas Picton's rough voice broke out of a neighbouring shadow.

'No, they an't. But they've sometimes got friends who are afraid for 'em and won't let 'em run their little heads into hornets' nests.'

He had gone out into the gallery to ~~spoke~~ a cheroot and chanced to meet Harry Beaumont, following Ellen at a discreet distance. Harry, although in an Infantry Regiment, had a natural genius for horsemanship. It was Wellington's practice to use a certain number of first-rate riders, hunting men, mounted on first-rate horses, as airmen are used in modern war. They would appear unexpectedly in the neighbourhood of the French Lines, observe what they could of the enemy's numbers and dispositions, and disappear as rapidly as they had come. General Crawford, accidentally acquainted with Harry's fine horsemanship and powers of observation, had spared him to Picton to play the part of such a scout. And on recognizing Harry, Sir Thomas had greeted him with a geniality which had made the youth feel modestly proud.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Do you want me to do something for you, Ellen?' he asked in an intimate voice. He felt an instinctive need to assert his claim on Ellen before the handsome A.D.C., superb in his scarlet uniform and his Orders.

'I want some one to go at once and tell Lord Wellington about Cousin Jane.'

'Certainly I'll go, if —'

Picton's hand fell heavily on his shoulder.

'No, you don't, my lad. If Somerset here says he's afraid, you may lay long odds there's something to be afraid of. He knows the Peer, every inch. If this young lady has an urgent message for Lord Wellington, she'd better deliver it herself. I'll say for him that he's always a gentleman in his behaviour to the ladies.'

'I can't think why you're so frightened of Cousin Arthur,' cried Ellen. 'He was ever so kind to me when I was a little girl, and he's just the same now.'

Nevertheless the evident fears of the Aide-de-Camp and the stalwart General made her heart flutter a little as she turned towards the door of the room in which Lord Wellington was reported to be. Fitzroy Somerset whispered something in agitated tones to Sir Thomas, in which the word 'indecorous' occurred. But Picton took no notice. He stepped in front of Ellen and rapped loudly on the door she was about to open; then vanished again into the shadows of the gallery.

'Don't swoon, Somerset,' he chuckled as he passed

THE SPANISH LADY

Lord Fitzroy. 'That baby-girl won't notice anything! It's the Peer who'll do the blushing; and serve him right.'

But when Ellen Ashby entered the room there was no one there, except the Commander-in-Chief. He sat motionless beside the writing-table. One arm rested upon it, the other hung down by his side. His chin was on his breast. He lifted it and looked at her for a moment as though he did not realize her. Then he pulled himself together, rose and addressed her with his usual rather formal kindliness.

'What is it, my dear? Are you seeking Lady Jane?'

'No, sir,' replied Ellen, 'I was seeking you, because there's no one else can prevent her from doing something which I don't think you'd like.'

'What's that?' he asked sharply.

'Cousin Jane was talking about Irish jigs and how much better they were than Spanish dances, and how she used to be reckoned the best jig-dancer in Ireland, and then some silly boys persuaded her to dance a jig. I hoped they wouldn't be able to get the right music, but they found a Scotch piper who's an Irishman and — Oh, godpapa! I know they're just doing it to laugh at Cousin Jane, and it isn't fair to make her a laughing-stock to the Spaniards and everybody.'

'Certainly not,' replied Wellington, frowning. 'Jane's a damn fool — excuse my language, my dear, but your Cousin Jane sometimes puts me quite out of

THE SPANISH LADY

patience. Come along and show me where she is. She and her boys shall get a flea or two in their ears.'

'Please not, sir!' pleaded Ellen. 'It's just Cousin Jane's good-nature – and boys always are silly, aren't they?'

'Your young friend What's-his-name among 'em?' he asked, and offered her his arm to leave the room.

'Harry Beaumont? Oh no – o!'

Ellen had an emphatic, a convincing way of saying 'Oh no – o!'

'He was helping me to look for you.'

'Was he? You should be more careful, my dear. People will talk if you are seen about so often with that youngster.'

'I'll try, sir. But Harry Beaumont and I have always played together. Papa was so fond of him. And there wasn't anyone else to play with at Morningfold.'

'There are plenty of other people for you to play with here.'

'Yes, sir. Lord Fitzroy Somerset helped me too.'

Wellington glanced down at her quickly. Was she as guileless as she appeared?

'Looking for me is Lord Fitzroy's business,' he replied, and added with a slight smile, 'And he does it too, by Gad!'

The bitter-sweet of his passion for Ismena, the pain and trouble of her quarrel with him, were gnaw-

THE SPANISH LADY

ing somewhere. But the mental habit of years enabled him to repress this feeling, and concentrate on the external matter in hand. The pain and trouble were waiting for him though, deep down in his heart. Instinctively he was soothed by the light touch of the girlish hand upon his arm, the confiding prattle of the fresh girlish voice in his ear.

They heard the pipes before they reached the ball-room. When they reached it, there was Lady Jane, capering in the centre, hands on hips, elbows well in evidence, the green and gold skirt caught up to give free play to those sturdy legs. It was difficult to say whether her leaps and plunges were setting the pace to the piper, or the piper with his skirling tune, was urging her on to show the world what Old Ireland could do. At any rate there was a look of supreme satisfaction on both their faces. The spectators also were enjoying themselves. Neither Spanish courtesy nor British self-control were quite sufficient to conceal that.

Wellington stepped up to the piper and tapped him smartly on the shoulder. The man cast an irritated glance back. When he saw who it was and heard the Chief's short 'Stop that noise,' his jaw and his pipes dropped. Lady Jane paused and looked inquiringly towards the piper. There was that in Wellington's eye which quelled even the undaunted spirit of Lady Jane. But he uttered no reproof. Offering her his arm with ceremonious courtesy, he said in icy accents:

THE SPANISH LADY

'I understand your ladyship has not partaken of supper. Allow me to take you in.'

Lady Jane had in fact supped heartily already; but she felt unable to protest. She allowed her Cousin Arthur to lead her silently away from the scene of her intended triumph.

CHAPTER VII

HARRY BEAUMONT remained in the gallery, near the card-room door. He stayed partly because he hoped to have a few more words with General Picton, for whom he had a boyish cult. He also stood still because he became lost in his own thoughts: unhappy thoughts. Before Ellen came to Cadiz, he had taken her love for granted; and formerly it was he who had been the better off, the better placed. At Cadiz he was becoming aware of another Ellen; an heiress, a relative of Lord Wellington's. He sometimes saw her in uneasy visions, surrounded by a crowd of young noblemen, blazing with Orders and all demanding her hand. The more he dwelt on such possibilities, the worse his pain grew. It was a very old pain, but he thought it was a quite new and extraordinary one and so bad it was hardly to be borne.

Alava had been seeking Sir Thomas Picton for some time. He was glad to chance on the General at last in the semi-darkness of the gallery, where they might escape observation. It was a stroke of luck for him that young Beaumont should be standing not far off, visible in the light of a hanging lamp. He drew Picton a little further into the shadow and began talking to him, at first in English, then in Spanish, in a low voice. And while the two were talking, they saw the Condesa de Careno come out of the card-room, with doña Pilar behind her. She espied Harry and paused before him.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Señor don Arrigo! Is it possible that you do not see me? Ah, no! You do see me, but you play the blind man.'

Harry started, and bowed in his best Spanish manner.

'I beg the Señora Condesa's pardon a thousand and a thousand times. I was thinking about something — I actually did not see her.'

Harry's Spanish was fluent and well pronounced.

'Señora Condesa!' she exclaimed. 'What have I done to deserve that? You used to call me doña Ismena, or even Ismena.'

'It is so long since you spoke to me, doña Ismena, that I had forgotten what I should call you,' replied Harry, carrying the war into the enemy's country.

'And whose fault is that, I should like to know? But you must talk to me now, just out of kindness. See! I am left alone, I am deserted. *Ay de mi!* I must be getting old and ugly.'

She sighed and Harry laughed quietly.

'*Vaya*, Condesita! I am an Englishman. I do not know how to pay compliments. But your mirror must have told you this evening who would be the most beautiful woman at the ball.'

'The most beautiful woman — ! *Cá — !* For an Englishman, you are a great flatterer. You do not think me so pretty as the English Miss with whom you now walk every day on the Alameda — Velintón's little goddaughter. But they say she is very rich and that you are her *novio*.'

THE SPANISH LADY

The light was so dim that Ismena could not really be sure that Harry blushed; yet she was sure.

'Who can have told you that, Condesita? Some fool, I should say. You cannot suppose that they would allow a young lady so rich, so noble, to marry a poor devil like me. No, Señora! You must understand that I am an insignificant fellow, with nothing in the world except a very good horse and a pretty good sword.'

Here perhaps Harry exaggerated a little, but ~~not~~ a great deal.

'If in truth you are not the *novio* of the little Miss, you have no excuse at all for so shamefully deserting your Spanish friend. You shall walk with me on the Alameda to-morrow, you shall come again, to my Quinta to perfect yourself in our Spanish dances. Caramba! You shall dance with me this very night.'

'What the greatest pleasure in life, doña Ismena, if you will condescend to dance with a bungler like myself,' rejoined Harry, offering his arm gallantly. But as with an enchanting smile, which the faint lamp-light just illumined, she laid her hand on his arm, she remembered — Like a bright-winged butterfly in the grasp of a rough finger and thumb, her joy was suddenly bruised, killed.

'No, Hari!' she cried — and there was a plaintive note in her voice — 'I cannot stay longer. My father is lying very ill at Seville, my brother is in great trouble and awaiting me at home. How could I

THE SPANISH LADY

forget? *Perdonadme Madre de Dios!* How could I for a moment permit myself to be happy?"

She clasped her hands and Harry saw two tears shining on her silken eyelashes.

The village folk at Morningfold used to say of Master Harry, that he had a kind heart. He was quick to sympathize with pain and trouble, whether the sufferers were young or old, high or low, man or beast. This was one reason — and a good reason too — why women in general found him lovable. But a harder man than Harry would have been moved by the tears of the beautiful Condesa de Careno. He was so much touched that he forgot all about Spanish etiquette, which did not permit a gentleman to touch a lady in public. He did not indeed know that where they were standing they could be seen by any of the few persons in the dim gallery. He took both Ismena's little white hands, pressed them between his own and kissed them. He murmured vague, incoherent words of kindness and consolation.

'Do not weep, *amighita!* I cannot bear to see you shed tears. *Pobrecita! Querida Condesita!*' He actually took out a beautiful silk bandana handkerchief which Ellen had sent him at Christmas, and hastily wiped away the two tears when they fell from her lashes to her cheeks. 'If I can be of any service to you, doña Ismena, command me.'

Ismena knew only too well that Ensign Harry could be of no possible use to her in her duel with the

THE SPANISH LADY

Commander-in-Chief. Nevertheless, it comforted her to be caressed by the kind handsome boy and to see pity and concern so clearly written on his face. And was not pity akin to Love? Love which she had so strangely and mortifyingly failed to win from him. She knew that, whatever others might suppose. Two others were indeed at that moment supposing something different from the truth. Picton and Alava were not too much engrossed by their *ête-à-ête* to note this little scene from their dark corner.

'By Gad!' chuckled Picton. 'The young rascal don't seem to need encouraging to make love to the lady. Impudent devils, the Light Bobs! I don't mind confessing it amuses me to see one of 'em running off with Wellington's particular Fancy under his almighty nose. But don't ruin the lad's prospects, Count Alava. He's the most promising young officer I've had under me for a long while.'

'I will endeavour, Señor General, to avoid doing so,' replied Alava. 'But even you, who do not love El Lord, must admit that the sacrifice of the most excellent young officer is a small thing in comparison to the success of the British Arms.'

'I suppose I've got to believe that tale,' returned Picton grudgingly. 'Vandeleur and half a dozen other sensible men have assured me it's true. But Wellington fooled by a woman! Well, I'm damned!'

'I fear most that this woman is but a bait laid by the hunter to trap our lion. She is happily amorous, and fickle. If your Beaumont can divert her attention

THE SPANISH LADY

from El Lord, all may be well. But her family will strongly oppose that. As I have said, I suspect the La Peñas of being engaged in a dangerous intrigue with the spy De Tremblaye. But no one will listen to me at Headquarters.'

'They won't listen to anyone. They're all too damn' proud and most of 'em too damn' stoopid. That Beaumont now, he's a quick-witted lad. He might serve not only to draw the lady away from her fond Peer, but to observe whether any dirty game is being played by her friends.'

'That is so.'

'But I don't think he'll like doing it. I mean he may like making love to the lady well enough, but he won't like playing the spy.'

'Caramba, Señor! I should not put the matter to him in that way. I shall endeavour to speak sympathetically and as a caballero. May I use your name to sanction my appeal to him to save the reputation, perhaps the life of the Commander-in-Chief?'

'By carrying off the Condesa? It looks as though he would not need much persuasion.'

'Excuse me, Señor. He not long ago abandoned the Condesa de Careno in order to court the young heiress, Lord Wellington's relative and godchild.'

'Picton whistled.

'Did he? The boy's a bit rash, even for a Light Bob. You may lay your life Wellington will want a Duke for the girl's money. He'd forgive a man sooner for robbing him of his mistress than for

THE SPANISH LADY

carrying off a female of his sacred family out of the Peerage. That's his Holy of Holies.'

'Then you agree with me that Beaumont should be encouraged to pay court to the Condesa de Careno, rather than to the little heiress? After all, what are the charms of a child, fresh from her convent, to those of the most beautiful and fascinating woman in Spain? The task should be easy.'

Picton reflected.

'I a'n't fond of that kind of intrigue,' he replied. 'But I'm inclined to believe there's something in your tale of the plot against Wellington. I know there are those among your nobility who'd be glad enough to get rid of him. As to Boney, he's never had any scruples about removing such persons as inconvenienced him. There's no doubt Wellington does that. By God, there's not one of us fit to put on the Peer's boots if he got an accident, curse him. So I suppose it's right the boy should take a risk rather than the Chief. He's a clever lad and the women are soft with him!'

At this moment the Condesa and doña Pilar passed them, Ensign Beaumont in attendance.

'I will find your coach for you, Señoras,' he was saying.

'That reminds me I ought to be going,' said Picton. 'I sail for Bristol at six o'clock to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE Condesa de Carño had no footman at the Quinta. Harry explored the street and found her coach waiting for her at the end of a line of various equipages. The night being fine, she and doña Pilar walked to it. Harry stood bare-headed while the lumbering vehicle, without space in which to turn, stumbled over the cobble-stones into a side street and disappeared as into a black ravine. The street in which he was left standing ran down to the western ramparts of the city. The light breeze that lifted his hair had a tang of salt in it and he could hear the low grave rhythm of the Atlantic. The street was dark save for a few lamps burning before shrines. At the end he could perceive a glimpse of sea and sky, pale in the rays of a descending moon. Instead of returning to the ball-room, he strolled down towards the quays. It was not doña Ismena, her beauty or even her distress, that troubled him. It was his own position in regard to Ellen Ashby. Hitherto it had been simple. He had been to her something between an elder brother and a lover. The two had been playmates from their childhood, when they had several times married each other with great ceremony and a rush ring. Later they had decided to marry as soon as they were grown up, and had kept to the decision.

Ellen was the only child of a retired Colonel, a relative of the Wellesley family and an early friend

THE SPANISH LADY

of Wellington's. Having lost a leg, his health and his wife in India, Colonel Ashby had taken his pension and retreated, somewhat morosely, to the village of Morningfold in Sussex. There were no other gentlefolk living in the village except the Squarson, Dr. Beaumont; a scholar, a good parish priest and a good sportsman. He also was a widower. His sister kept house for him and looked after his grandson Harry, whose father was in the Indian Army. The Colonel and the Rector soon became fast friends and Harry and Ellen were inseparable, except when the boy was at school. Ellen was not sent to school. Colonel Ashby, in spite of having been a devoted lover and husband, was a misogynist. He shrank from allowing the simple, untutored girl, who was his companion, to be transformed into a young lady. Ellen stopped at home and received a better education than most girls from her father and Dr. Beaumont. Then there were weekly excursions to Brighton, where a French *émigré* family taught French and dancing. In these subjects she made excellent progress, as well as in riding her rough pony and even the Rector's big hunter. But in Berlin woolwork, the making of wax flowers or the pressing and drying of real flowers, she received no instruction. And the ladies of the neighbouring gentry eyed her with disapproval, as an ill-brought-up, ignorant little creature and a sad, sad tom-boy. Had they realized that the morose Colonel was closely connected with the aristocracy, they might have made

THE SPANISH LADY

more efforts to lure him from his seclusion. But if some titled relative did occasionally visit him from Brighton, no one was aware of it. Arthur Wellesley did not frequent Brighton, but when in England, he had never failed to visit Tom Ashby and bring some attractive gift for his little goddaughter. It was not from this side of her family, however, that wealth had come to Ellen. Colonel Ashby had made in middle age what his relations called 'a shocking bad match.' He had married the daughter of a chaplain in India; pretty, penniless and of no particular family. An elder brother of hers out there had made a considerable fortune; but beyond receiving a fine pearl necklace as a wedding-present, and, at intervals, sundry cashmere shawls and amusing sets of lacquer boxes, Mrs. Ashby had not benefited, or expected to benefit, by his wealth. Shortly after Colonel Ashby's death, Ellen's uncle, his wife and child, died in an epidemic of cholera and she remained the sole heiress of his wealth. The County exclaimed in an amazement that was positively angry, at the stroke of luck which had befallen 'that little Miss Ashby'; and wished they had taken more notice of her. But their repentance came too late. Miss Ashby had already passed into the kind, if inadequate, care of Lady Jane Gervase. She was now made a Ward in Chancery, and could not become betrothed or even leave England without the Lord Chancellor's permission. But Lord Eldon, who was not personally acquainted with Lady Jane, thought there could be no harm in the young lady's

THE SPANISH LADY

going to Spain with a woman of her ladyship's rank, a General's wife and a cousin of the Commander-in-Chief.

Meanwhile, when Harry was eighteen, his grandfather had bought him a commission in the Rifles, under a Colonel Dr. Beaumont knew for a good officer and a religious man. Harry had returned home on a short leave about the time of Colonel Ashby's death. He and Ellen had then plighted their troth. They had said nothing about it to their elders, who would naturally have laughed to scorn an engagement between a youth of nineteen and a girl of sixteen, both of them without fortune. But Lady Jane, an inveterate sentimentalist, was practically their confidante. So here she was, most unscrupulously assisting Ellen to meet an unofficial *fiancé*, of whom Lord Eldon could not possibly have approved. She had persuaded a friendly General to bring Ensign Beaumont to Cadiz with him as Aide-de-Camp; and to berth him there in charge of details of the Rifles, newly landed from England, and some others invalided from the Front. Harry had been in Cadiz a short time before Lady Jane and Ellen arrived. It was then that he had made the acquaintance of the enchanting Condesa de Careno. But he was no Don Juan; he was merely a flirt. How he had learned the art of flirtation in the intervals of much strenuous fighting, can only be guessed. It may be he had caught glimpses of the fact that he was a handsome fellow with something about him —

THE SPANISH LADY

perhaps a kind voice and a merry blue eye – that commended him to women. Received while he was absorbed in his business of fighting, the news that Ellen Ashby had inherited money had not greatly impressed him. He had only reflected that they would be able to marry as soon as the War was over; and continued fighting and writing amusing letters to Ellen in his intervals of idleness.

But recently he had received two shocks. First, the discovery that in flirting with the Condesa de Careno, he had been poaching on the preserves of a certain Great Personage. - Then the realization of a change in Ellen's position. Lady Jane had welcomed him so warmly on her arrival at Cadiz, Ellen had been so entirely the same Ellen, that he had resumed his old attitude towards her – half loverly, half big-brotherly – without a qualm. But of late his own observation and a letter from Dr. Beaumont had given him pause. He saw the justice of what his grandfather had written: that at Ellen's age and in her altered position, he had no right to engage her affections or in any respect compromise her. He saw too that the World, in which he counted for so little, might easily regard him as a fortune-hunter. Life, hitherto so simple, had suddenly become complicated. Harry sighed heavily and half wished himself dodging three French Hussars, with that fine hunter between his knees which Dr. Beaumont had sacrificed his own stable to send him. A hand on his shoulder startled him. He turned quickly and his

THE SPANISH LADY

hand flew to a pistol which was not there. A pleasant voice addressed him in Spanish.

'Excuse me, Señor. I aroused you too abruptly from your meditations. I am, however, a quite harmless personage — Alava, General attached to the Staff of Lord Wellington.'

Harry saluted and replied suitably.

'Sir Thomas Picton was speaking to me about you,' continued Alava. 'He recommended you as an officer of whom he had a high opinion. As you have walked so far in the direction of my quarters, I hope you will do me the honour to come in and drink a glass of wine with me.'

Harry stammered, could not express himself suitably. Picton had praised him, General Alava was inviting him to his quarters. It was overwhelming. Alava was not displeased at the young man's modesty.

The Count's quarters were of the best. He caused a fire of logs to be lighted out of compliment to his English guest. They sat down before it and the wine and the tobacco were good. Alava's admiration for the English Commander-in-Chief approached adoration. The peasantry of his own country he loved and admired. For the nobility, though one of them himself, he had nothing but bitter contempt. He spoke of the La Peña family: degenerates, without patriotism, thinking only how they might repair the fortunes they had wasted at Court in senseless extravagance. The Condesa de Careno he spoke of as a

THE SPANISH LADY

last lovely blossom adorning this decaying family tree.

'She is,' he said, 'considered the most beautiful and bewitching woman in Spain. She has rejected the addresses of a prince, even of a Cardinal. Not that she is what you English call virtuous. To have been so at the Court might have been reckoned a reflection on our Queen. But she has delicacy and fidelity of a kind. While a *liaison* lasts, she has always hitherto devoted herself to one lover only. I tell you this, Señorito, that you may understand how singular is your good fortune.'

Alava smiled at Harry, expressively. The youth blushed the more because he ardently desired not to do so.

'The Condesa has been exceedingly kind to me,' he replied; and added, with embarrassment, 'I hope there has been nothing in my conduct to give cause for scandal about her.'

'If it be scandalous to be reputed her lover — yes. It is generally supposed that you have that good fortune — at least that you had it before the return of Lord Wellington.'

'But I am not — I never have been the Condesa's lover,' almost shouted Harry; and added with more dignity, 'It gives me great annoyance that such a report should be circulated.'

Alava smiled gently.

'I know you English. It is your etiquette for a gentleman always to deny such relations. But I can

THE SPANISH LADY

easily imagine that you may have another reason for being annoyed, even alarmed, at this report. It is well known that Lord Wellington has been for some months the lover of my beautiful countrywoman. You will doubtless have heard that.'

'I have heard some gossip to that effect,' replied Harry cautiously. 'Every one has, I suppose.'

'And you are naturally afraid to be known as the rival of the Commander-in-Chief,' suggested Alava. 'It is truly a difficult position for a young officer.'

Harry, his Spanish becoming rather incoherent, muttered something about 'idle gallantry' and the whole affair being a trifle of not the least consequence. Alava leaned forward and laid his hand on Harry's sleeve. He spoke very seriously.

'Listen, Señorito, I beg of you. Admitting that your relations with the Condesa de Careno are but those of idle gallantry, there is yet no doubt that it is in your power to distract the attention of this too-charming siren from Lord Wellington; for whom it is probable that she has never experienced a real passion. Should you do so the friends of your great Commander-in-Chief, the friends of your great country, would regard you as having rendered a notable service to both. You may have heard rumours that Lord Wellington is oftener here in Cadiz than the political situation really demands. His nearest friends believe – I hesitate to say this of a man whom I revere and love, but even a Hero is also a man – the officers in closest touch with him fear most that the

THE SPANISH LADY

lover in Wellington contends with the Commander-in-Chief, and that the lover increasingly gains.'

'People say that — I don't believe it!' cried Harry hotly.

'Yet that such a report should be current, even should it not be true, is highly disadvantageous to El Lord. His soldiers unhappily do not love him. They will cease to respect, to have confidence in him if this gossip continues much longer. Yet no one dares to remonstrate with him. His friends can only watch him advancing upon a very dangerous road.'

'I can't believe it,' repeated Harry. 'What does General Picton say to it?'

'Like yourself, Señorito, he could not believe it. But so many officers of high standing have spoken to him in the same sense, that he is at last obliged to do so. I myself know better than anyone else how great is the cause for anxiety. I am in close touch with the Spanish Secret Service and have also my own channels of information. Sir Thomas Picton has recommended you to me as an officer worthy of confidence. I will therefore tell you precisely what I suspect, what I fear, what I know. I am convinced that De Tremblaye is an agent of Bonaparte and engaged in a plot against the life of Lord Wellington.'

'De Tremblaye!' exclaimed Harry. 'I don't know the man personally, but supposed him to be a spy on our side.'

'His position has always been a little ambiguous. He has in fact been a spy on both sides — but Lord

THE SPANISH LADY

Wellington has always believed that his real sympathies, his real usefulness were for us. When precisely this ceased to be true, I cannot tell. But I suspect that Bonaparte himself is now in communication with the man. The La Pefias and their whole tribe are without patriotism, seeking only their personal advantage. When Lord Wellington became the lover of doña Ismena, they expected a golden shower to fall upon the entire family. Nothing came. They were furious. Then stupidly, yes, I must say very stupidly, our Great Man attacks this already discontented family, and several others, equally unpatriotic. De Tremblaye pretends to be their friend. He is a noble and can mix with them as a man of lower birth could not. He tells them doubtless, that they may find a patron in France more generous, more appreciative than this mad Englishman. In short, I desperately fear that one night when our invaluable Commander-in-Chief, our incomparable Wellington rides out alone to the Quinta of the beautiful Ismena — one night, he will return no more.'

The earnestness, the emotion with which Alava spoke, could not but impress Harry.

'But, Señor Conde!' he exclaimed, 'why do you not give them this information at Headquarters?'

Alava made a despairing gesture.

'It is of no use. They will not believe a word of it. As your Picton says, their Staff officers are too proud, too stupid. They complain that the Spanish

THE SPANISH LADY

Secret Service always finds mares-nests in order to get money. But those to whom I owe most of my information are not Secret Service agents — they are patriots. *Dios mio*, Señorito! It is terrible to be aware of this danger hanging over our Hero, over my country and yours, and to be powerless to avert it.'

The tears sprung to Alava's eyes.

'It is indeed, Señor,' replied Harry. 'I, any of us, would of course give our lives to protect the Chief. What do you suggest that we should do?'

'There is no sacrifice of life required,' returned Alava, smiling again. 'All that I ask of you is that you should so engage the attention of the Condesa de Careno for the next few days, that she shall not invite Lord Wellington to the Quinta. I leave Cadiz tomorrow to pursue my investigations privately, and hope very soon to return with the proofs of De Tremblaye's guilt and perhaps of the La Peñas.'

'But doña Ismena has the best heart in the world,' protested Harry. 'If she knew of this hellish plot, she would not allow Lord Wellington to come to her house.'

Alava shrugged his shoulders.

'One of two things, my friend. Either the Condesa de Careno does know of it, and family affection and pride outweigh her natural goodness of heart — or she is but a piece on the chessboard, moved by others, and would be both angry and incredulous were she told of it. She would very probably tell El

THE SPANISH LADY

Lord, who, out of mere pride and obstinacy, would go all the more to the Quinta.'

'I cannot think that the Condesa would put aside Lord Wellington for a mere subaltern,' said Harry, after a pause.

'I see,' returned Alava, somewhat dryly. 'You fear the Commander-in-Chief. A few minutes ago you were ready to offer your life in his service, and now you are afraid to risk his displeasure.'

'No — no!' cried Harry. 'That is nothing if I can really keep him out of danger. What does General Picton think?'

'He agrees with me that you may render a service to Lord Wellington by pursuing this idle gallantry of yours.'

'But,' stammered Harry, 'the fact is, I am in love with a young lady whom I have some hopes of marrying.'

Alava could not help laughing.

'I fail to see how that affects the situation. Do you not know, Señorito, that young ladies adore a man *à bonnes fortunes*?'

Still Harry looked dubious. Alava might be better informed than himself about young ladies in general, but he knew more about Ellen.

'You feel then,' continued Alava coldly, 'that you cannot consent to perform this service to the Army, to your country? You may regret your decision should the Commander-in-Chief be kidnapped or murdered before I am able to convict the conspirators.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Good God!' thought Harry suddenly, 'what an ass I am! After all, I've no business to be hanging about Ellen, behaving as though we were engaged, as I've been doing. I'd much better be flirting a bit with Ismena – especially if it keeps her out of mischief.'

'Very well, sir,' he said, lapsing into English. 'I'll do whatever you and General Picton wish. It a'n't the sort of way I prefer to make love to a woman' – Harry spoke this with the air of a man of experience – 'it seems a bit too much like a plot against her. But it's all right really, because I'm not her lover and don't mean to be, and I'll try to keep doña Ismena amused until you return – if they don't march us all up North before then.'

CHAPTER IX

FROM the Condesa de Careno's Quinta a long walled enclosure ran down to the shores of the bay. The upper part was a flower-garden, the lower an orange-grove. At the end of it was a quay and a large building meant as a place for the storage of the produce of the farm and its shipment to the Conde's house at Seville. It had also been conveniently placed for smuggling purposes. The present Conde, always a valetudinarian, had transformed the upper part into a pleasant room, where he might sit and inhale on one side the sea breezes, on the other the perfume of the orange-blossom. A small door and staircase, leading immediately on to the strip of waste land outside the enclosure, may have been contrived as a means of cheating the jealousy of his first Condesa.

On the night of the ball a boat touched the quay below this building. The rowers, having moored it to a post, entered the store-room or boat-house below and throwing themselves on some sacks, composed themselves to sleep. Three passengers, wearing the dark cloaks and sombreros of their country, walked up the orange-grove towards the house, whispering as they went. Before they reached it, two stepped aside, behind a clipped hedge, while the third went on. He knocked at the door. An elderly woman opened it.

'Is the Conde de la Peña within?' he asked.

THE SPANISH LADY

'He is, Señor,' she replied.

'Then tell him that a gentleman desires to speak with him.'

The cloaked figure disappeared into the house. There was silence. The waters of the sheltered bay were almost still and blotted out in darkness, except where the riding-lights of anchored ships rose and fell almost imperceptibly. An orange falling to the ground with a thump startled the two behind the hedge. It seemed to them an alarmingly long time before their emissary reappeared, followed by a much smaller figure, also wrapped in a cloak and carrying a dark lantern.

'Follow me, Señores,' said the small man.

The four stepped noiselessly over the grass, threading their way among the orange-trees, until they reached the stone steps and terrace leading to the garden-room. The small man went up first and opened the door, which was unlocked.

'Come in, Señores, I beg,' he said in a voice of which the perfect courtesy concealed the perturbation written on the pallid, large-eyed face the darkness veiled. He set his lantern on the floor and opened it. Its ray searched the depths of the room and revealed a dark figure rising from a couch. There was a momentary sensation in the group of arrivals.

'Do not be alarmed, Señores,' said the apparition, speaking with a foreign accent. 'It is I, De Tremblaye.'

THE SPANISH LADY

There were greetings. Introductions were unnecessary, for De Tremblaye was known to all the members of the La Peña tribe present; namely the Marquès de Montespínosa, the Abbé, Colonel don Diego de la Peña, and the Conde don Alonzo, their unwilling host.

The room was evidently in use, for there were half-burnt candles in candelabras and sconces and a large brass *brasero* filled with hot charcoal. Alonzo, with De Tremblaye's help, drew curtains. But on the side towards the waste land, over which the highway ran at no great distance, he opened the window a little.

'Thus we shall hear the bells of my sister's mules when she returns,' he said. 'Come now, let us have some light in the room.'

So he lighted some of the candles from his lantern. The visitors had disembarrassed themselves of their cloaks and hats. The Marquès de Montespínosa had seated himself in a gilt and brocade arm-chair. He was a man about fifty, with a swollen body and a puffy white face, which melted into it in a series of graduated waves. Nevertheless with his small white swollen hands, gorgeously ringed, resting on the gilded arms of the chair, his small black eyes, under straight black eyebrows, fixed sternly on the Conde de la Peña, he contrived to look dignified, even majestic. The light revealed Colonel don Diego as a youngish man, tall, with a fierce black military moustache and small side-whiskers. He eyed his

THE SPANISH LADY

Cousin Alonzo menacingly. The third La Peña was an Abbé, his attire a blend of the fashionable and the sacerdotal, his face smooth and sly.

De Tremblaye returned to his couch, somewhat apart from the family group. Half reclining among its tawny velvet cushions, his elegant figure clad in a well-cut black English suit, with a frilled shirt, he surveyed them with his intelligent eyes and slight ironic smile.

'You understand, Cousin,' said the Marquès, addressing don Alonzo, 'that Diego, the Abbé and myself come to you representing all the grandees and hidalgos whom the wild beast of a heretic has had the insolence to attack.'

'Yes, yes, Marquès, I understand,' replied don Alonzo nervously. 'And I would venture to say that I regret you should be so precipitate in your action. Patience is a virtue, Señores.'

'Patience!' repeated don Diego scornfully. 'Recommend that virtue to the *Rubios*. They are always devilish precipitate. Why did you not come to Cadiz earlier, Cousin?'

Don Alonzo thought a little what had delayed him, taking a pinch of snuff.

'A touch of the fever. And then my beloved father you know what his condition was, even before this shock befell him.'

'If he dies,' declared the Marquès, 'his blood will be on the head of the infamous Velintón. I myself shall not long survive this insult.'

THE SPANISH LADY

He closed his eyes slowly, shook his head and sighed through his nose.

'Why in the name of God has not your sister prevented this scandal?' asked don Diego, fuming. 'Some months ago we heard Velintòn was at her feet. He must have tired of her soon.'

'Tired of her!' repeated don Alonzo, smiling haughtily in don Diego's direction. '*Que crees?* Ismena de Careno y La Peña is not a woman to get tired of. The truth is that living here in retirement, at the request of El Lord, she has only just learned of this abominable affair.'

The Marquès here turned to De Tremblaye.

'You, Señor, have given it as your opinion that this extraordinary Lord was positively ignorant of the lineage of the noble lady with whom he had the honour to associate?'

De Tremblaye raised himself into a sitting posture to reply.

'I think it probable, your Excellency. You must remember that if this *liaison* has lasted some months, the lovers have not seen much of each other. Englishmen in general devote little time to Love, and however much Lord Wellington's passions are engaged, his mind is doubtless occupied with more important affairs.'

'Holy Virgin of the Atochal' exclaimed the Marquès, throwing up hands and eyes. 'These barbarians are then as much heretics in the religion of Venus as they are in that of the Mother of God.'

THE SPANISH LADY

He crossed himself and kissed his thumb.

Don Diego uttered several impatient imprecations or invocations, and added:

'Your sister must make haste to enlighten the animal, or we shall all be lost.'

Don Alonzo looked important.

'Listen, my friends,' he said. 'My sister went this evening to a ball given by Velintòn. She looked as beautiful as an angel. She promised me to call El Lord to account for his conduct.' He paused and then continued, still more impressively, waving a delicate hand that flashed with diamonds, 'Señores, I doubt not that at this moment the Hero of Salamanca kneels at Ismena's feet, imploring her pardon for his infamous but ignorant attack upon her beloved father and brother and promising them every reparation in the power of the Master of England's gold.'

'That's all very well, Alonzo,' cried Diego. 'But what about her cousins?'

'Patience, my friend,' replied don Alonzo with dignity. 'That will come afterwards. My sister will see to it that none of her family suffer.'

'But how if El Lord should refuse the lady's request?' interpolated De Tremblaye, who had returned to his lounging attitude on the sofa.

Four voices at once declared that to be impossible: and fell to wrangling again over the brother and sister's neglect of the general family interest. Meantime De Tremblaye, on his sofa, frowned impatiently.

THE SPANISH LADY

At length he rose, a tall slight dark figure, and stood before the group.

'I implore you, Messieurs,' he said in French, 'to decide before the return of the Condesa, what you intend to do should Wellington reject her appeal. Do not cry out' – for the chorus of incredulity broke out again – 'I believe that El Lord is as much enamoured as ever of doña Ismena. But he is an Englishman; and an Englishman rarely allows a mistress to influence his decision in a matter of public policy. Then, Messieurs, I repeat – what are you prepared to do should the Condesa's prayer be rejected by the haughty Wellington? Will you accept from him disgrace and penury? Why? Because he pretends to be the friend of Spain? But I tell you I have heard him myself express his contempt for her King, her Church, her Nobility, her Army. Yes, he heaps insults and wrongs on noble and Catholic Spain. Do you not know now from your own experience of what atrocities he is capable?'

'*Madre de Dios perdonadme!*' groaned the Marquès. 'That is all true, too true.'

De Tremblaye continued:

'King Joseph has never treated the nobility of Spain with such indignity. I have already told you the sentiments of the Emperor with regard to this country. There is only one man who stands in the way of a happy and honourable settlement of the affairs of Spain, and that man is Milord Wellington.'

He had spoken with a fervour unusual in him.

THE SPANISH LADY

But perhaps he felt he had gone too far, for he now resumed his usual tone of slightly mocking imperturbability.

'Of course if milord plays Anthony to the Cleopatra of the beautiful Condesa, the situation will be immediately changed. Her family must give political support to her lover. It would be insane, even criminal to do anything else. But suppose doña Ismena is unable to defend you — I merely ask, Messieurs, what you propose to do then?'

All this time the La Peñas had been sitting silent. Fear, suspicion, anger, pride, indecision were dividing their minds in different proportions according to their temperaments. When De Tremblaye had ended his discourse, the Marquès de Montespínosa took out a large scented silk handkerchief and coughed into it. All eyes were turned upon him. As the senior member of the family present, it was plainly his part to speak. He did so, still holding the handkerchief in his hand.

'Caramba, Señor! In that case we would consent to any step which you might think it necessary to take.'

De Tremblaye smiled more ironically than usual.

'You will consent to any step which I may take? A thousand thanks, your Excellency. But that is not enough. I, a foreigner, cannot undertake alone an affair of the highest importance to your family, and to your entire country. I ask what will you, Messieurs, be prepared to do?'

THE SPANISH LADY

Don Diego stepped right up to the Frenchman. His slightly prominent under-jaw was clenched, his black moustaches seemed to bristle, as bringing his hand down on De Tremblaye's shoulder, he said in a hoarse whisper:

'To kill Velintòn! Let him die!'

At this moment the distant sound of jingling mule-bells was heard through the open window.

'Listen!' said De Tremblaye. 'Is that the Condesa arriving?'

'It is assuredly my sister!' cried don Alonzo, in accents of joyous relief. 'Let me hasten to meet her!'

He moved towards the door with alacrity. De Tremblaye intercepted him.

'You will bring the Condesa here, Conde? These gentlemen will, I think, wish to speak with her themselves.'

'I should think so!' ejaculated don Diego, darting a look of contempt at don Alonzo. '*Caracoles!* I shall come and fetch her if you don't bring her quick.'

The Marquès spoke politely.

'*Hijo mio*, I beg you will bring Ismena at once. She will, I am sure, be able to relieve our anxiety.'

When the door had closed behind Alonzo, don Diego expressed his opinion of his cousin, calling on a great variety of saints to witness to it.

The Marquès remonstrated with dignity.

'I believe, my friend,' said he, 'that if the honour and fortune of our family should turn out to be at stake, Alonzo, like myself, would not shrink from

THE SPANISH LADY

any step which might be necessary to save it. But let us wait until Ismenita arrives. I am convinced the little treasure will tell us we have nothing to fear.'

Don Diego growled:

'She will doubtless tell us that she has saved her father and brother. As to what happens to the rest of us, these miserable egoists are perfectly indifferent.'

'I must say,' broke in De Tremblaye, in spite of himself, 'that should Wellington spare the Marquès de la Peña and his son, who have benefited as much as anyone in this affair, he would not prosecute the other gentlemen concerned. He has a certain sense of justice.'

'I do not believe it,' cried the Colonel. 'That man can have no sense of justice.'

'At least let us not quarrel with the Condesa,' returned De Tremblaye. 'She is the decoy by which we must entice milord into the net, if we find it necessary to catch him.'

The Marquès expatiated on the charms and amorous conquests of Ismena.

'It would be impossible for any man alive to refuse a favour to that woman,' he said, and sat back comfortably in his chair.

'But she is an egoist,' growled don Diego.

De Tremblaye also felt anxious.

'Supposing Wellington should really belie himself and succumb to the charms of the Careno, how do I stand?' he thought. 'I have imprudently placed myself at the mercy of a pack of imbeciles.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Before long, light footsteps were heard on the stone terrace without. The door was thrown open by don Alonzo and the Condesa stood there. She was wrapped in a thick black silk shawl and a black lace mantilla covered her head. The Frenchman's rouge showed scarlet on her pale cheeks, her eyes glittered like black diamonds and she held herself like the Empress of the world.

When Harry Beaumont was no longer at her side, and her coach was bumping over the stony streets of Cadiz and the rough road along the Isthmus, she had realized her disaster. Like a wound, the pain of which is not so great at first but burns up more and more fiercely as the minutes pass, so her rage, her humiliation, grew upon her; her realization of the catastrophe threatening her family, which they had looked to her to avert, of what their anger and disappointment would be when they discovered her powerlessness to do so. The proud passionate blood of a race of hidalgos rose in her veins and submerged the gay good-natured Ismena of every day.

She advanced into the room sombrely, as into a death-chamber; extended her hand for the Marquès to kiss, greeted the others with the least possible greeting. Then she stood still, in a silence which her anxious relatives felt a difficulty in breaking. At length the Marquès coughed into his handkerchief again and said:

'Vamos, hija mia! We are expecting to hear what happened at the English ball this evening.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Dofia Ismena, hardly glancing at him, replied coldly:

'What happened at the ball? What usually happens at balls. People dance.'

Don Diego came closer to her. He bent his brows and twisted his moustache.

'And with whom, my cousin, did you dance? Perhaps you danced with Velintòn.'

'That is so, Diego. I danced a quadrille with Velintòn.'

'It is a dance which is convenient for conversation,' returned Diego, beginning to be exasperated by Ismena's coolness. 'I should like to know, Señorita, whether you properly rebuked El Lord for his ignoble behaviour to your very noble family?'

'I did not, Diego,' she replied coldly, glancing at him between the wavings of her fan. And while he stood choking at her insolence, she suddenly addressed De Tremblaye, who had placed himself in the background.

'You were right, Monsieur. You knew these *Rubios* better than I did.' Velintòn has rejected my petition, he has repulsed my prayers, my supplications on behalf of my family.'

A cry of rage broke from don Diego.

'The scoundrell! *Caracoles!* He shall pay for it!'

'Holy Virgin of Atocha, help us!' ejaculated Alonzo. His attitude of deep dejection had more than half revealed the truth before Ismena had

THE SPANISH LADY

spoken. The blow was severe, yet the Marquès remained dignified.

'You must see him again, *hija mia*. He was perhaps drunk. The *Rubios* are all drunkards and to some men wine gives black humours. It is impossible that a gentleman should continue to refuse so reasonable a request from a lady who has honoured him with her favour. Try again, Ismenita *mia*.'

'No, Señor!' Ismena flung out emphatically. 'Never again will I humiliate myself before that man — never!'

She threw up her chin and her eyes flashed.

'But, *hermanita*!' pleaded her brother, 'think of us, I implore you. Think of your father. Do you wish him to receive his death-blow? Think of all the gentlemen concerned in this affair who are looking to you to protect them.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'I have done my best, *hermanito*. It is not my fault if Englishmen are wild beasts.'

'This, Ismena, is naturally a disappointment for us all,' said don Diego malevolently. 'We have heard a great deal of talk about the infatuation of the Hero of Salamanca for the beautiful Condesa de Careno. Your family have naturally expected some share in your good fortune — instead of that, comes this abominable outrage. There must have been some exaggeration in the reports of Velintón's infatuation. At any rate it is now at an end and he has

THE SPANISH LADY

perhaps seized with eagerness an opportunity of casting off a mistress of whom he is weary.'

In a flash Ismena had reached the Colonel and hit him across the face with her fan such a blow that the fan cracked in her hand.

'Liar!' she screamed. 'Cad! Insolent booby!'

Don Diego's hand actually flew to his sword. The two glared at each other face to face, like a couple of snarling dogs. For a man of his birth to be struck, even by a woman, was an indescribable insult.

'If you were a man — !' he gasped, half speechless with fury.

The Marquès and don Alonzo stood staring, momentarily paralysed by this sudden thunderclap. It was De Tremblaye who stepped between the combatants and said soothingly:

'Come, Condesita! Come, Colonel! This is not a time to quarrel among yourselves. Let me assure you, Colonel, that you are very much mistaken in supposing that milord is no longer enamoured of the Condesa. The officers of his staff believe that he loves her to madness. Yes, Madame, they are very much afraid of your charms. They think it is to see you that he comes to Cadiz, not to take counsel with the Cortes.'

'That makes it all the clearer that she has not pleaded our cause with sufficient zeal,' fumed don Diego.

'One more effort, my child, before we despair!'

THE SPANISH LADY .

said the Marquès, at once ingratiating and authoritative.

'Courage, *hermanita*!' cried Alonzo. 'You hear what De Tremblaye says?'

'*Hija mia*, it is assuredly your duty to make another effort before abandoning your family to ruin,' counselled the Abbé.

The family gathered, they pressed close round Ismena, they talked all four together, gesticulating, cajoling, scolding, pleading at the top of their voices. In the midst of the hubbub Ismenita stood squeezing herself together with clasped hands, like a small frightened animal or an obstinate child. The tears ran unchecked down her cheeks, while she replied to them only by tiny sobs and occasional interjections of — 'No! No! No, Señores!'

When he found an opportunity to make himself heard, De Tremblaye came to her rescue.

'I beg you, Señores, to leave the Condesa in peace. She is perfectly right. To attempt to soften the heart of Milord Wellington is to lose precious time. He has already taken steps to have this case of peculation, as he calls it, laid before the Regency, and you can take my word for it, as well as the Condesa's, that no power on earth will move him.'

The gravity with which De Tremblaye spoke impressed the excited noblemen.

'The first thing is that Madame la Comtesse should retire,' suggested De Tremblaye. 'She can return before you gentlemen leave, to bid you fare-

THE SPANISH LADY

well. For the present, she would do well to rest and take a cordial to calm her agitated nerves. Let me give you my arm to the door, Madame. I wish I could escort you further, but time is precious. Don Alonzo will fetch you before your cousins depart.'

When the door had closed behind Ismena, the Marquès once more took his seat in the brocaded arm-chair and looked round the group very gravely.

'We must trust in the Blessed Virgin of the Atocha,' he said.

'She will assuredly help us,' agreed the Abbé, crossing himself and hurriedly muttering an *Ave*. Then turning to De Tremblaye, he said: 'What counsel can you give us, Monsieur? It is true that we have many friends in the Cortes. We have also enemies. Then there are the low-born fellows who call themselves patriots and are really bought by English gold. How can we best defend ourselves against this pack of wild beasts?'

'Kill Velintòn!' ejaculated don Diego, rolling furious eyes. 'Let him die!'

'But, *Gesù!* How can we kill him?' asked don Alonzo. 'It will be no advantage to us to save our fortunes, if we are to lose our lives.'

'It is not only our fortunes, *hijo mio*, which we have to consider,' interposed the Marquès, waving his hand in a stately manner. 'It is the honour of the House of La Peña. It is our honour above all that this heretic counterjumper attacks. It cannot be

THE SPANISH LADY

denied that for so abominable an outrage he deserves the garotte.'

'He may get it yet, the scoundrel,' cried the Colonel. 'If he is half as much in love with Ismena as De Tremblaye asserts, she ought to be able to bring him here, to this very room, one night — Caramba! you can leave me to manage the rest.'

'But, Cousin,' protested don Alonzo, 'we should be suspected, and then we should certainly be executed, unless the populace tore us to pieces first.'

'I see no reason why we should be suspected,' observed the Marquès. 'The ship in which we have come from Lisbon was supposed to be bound for Buenos Ayres, and no one except the persons interested knew we had gone aboard her. Nor is anyone aware that we are here except Ismenita's excellent servants, who are, I am told, perfectly to be trusted.'

'But, Marquès, people know that I am in Cadiz,' whined don Alonzo.

'You must trust in God, *hijo mio*, and in *Maria purissima*,' returned the Marquès, crossing himself.

'Presumably El Lord does not ride out at night without an escort,' objected the Abbè.

'That is precisely what he does,' broke in De Tremblaye, disguising his eagerness. 'Wellington's Spanish valet, who supplies me with information, has several times told me that milord has ridden out here alone, after nightfall. The hypocritical Englishman likes to imagine he is concealing his amour.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'If he rides alone, why should we not attack him on the road?' suggested don Alonzo. 'Were he killed there, it would be taken for the work of ordinary bandits.'

'That is no bad idea,' said the Colonel.

'Not so easy as it appears,' commented De Tremblaye. 'The English patrol the bit of road between this Quinta and the City gate after dark in some force and very carefully. The alleged reason for this vigilance is that there are refugees of bad character camped on the Isthmus just now, besides gipsies, and that English soldiers are tempted out by them at night and do not return.'

'If we held El Lord here, at our mercy,' said the Marquès, 'the affair might be settled without bloodshed. The man would be a fool if he did not consent to abandon his absurd attack upon us, rather than sacrifice his life.'

'If he did, he would find some other way of ruining us,' opined don Diego. '*Qué diablo!* I am tired of the English and would sooner have the French. King Joseph would receive us of the nobility with open arms. We have only to wait a little, until Napoleon returns from Russia, to see Velintòn and the whole horde of *Rubios* swept into the sea. As to the mob of patriots, they will get the gallows they deserve.'

'Nevertheless the French attach importance to Velintòn,' said De Tremblaye, narrowing his already narrow eyes, as he looked slowly from one to the

THE SPANISH LADY

other. 'I had a letter from Fouché himself some months ago, offering me an immense reward if I would remove the English Commander-in-Chief. I refused — naturally.'

'You refused?' jerked out don Diego, pricked by a sudden suspicion. 'Why?'

'Because,' returned De Tremblaye coldly, 'I am not a hired assassin. Nevertheless I think it only fair to let you know that I have more recently received a letter from a greater personage than Fouché, promising the highest honours and rewards in his power to bestow, to any Spaniard who will assist that very great personage by removing this Englishman, who is an obstacle to all the plans made for the peace and prosperity of Spain. That letter I could show you now, but I fear to do so. Its possession is a continual threat of death to me.'

'You need not fear, Monsieur,' replied the Marquès with dignity. 'The honour of Spanish hidalgos assures your safety.'

To this the three other Spaniards said their Amen. With a jesting apology, De Tremblaye removed his coat. He drew out a pen-knife and carefully opened a seam in it. Thence he drew out a thin piece of folded paper, inscribed in a small, clerkly hand and signed by another, with a heavier pen and a great flourish. He handed it to the Marquès with the demeanour of one handling sacred things.

'The name of the greatest man in the world stands there,' he said. 'It is signed by his own hand.'

THE SPANISH LADY

As the La Peñas, leaning over the Marquès' chair, eagerly deciphered the letter, he continued:

'You may trust that man to reward his friends and to punish his enemies. With the English it is just the opposite. They make a great to-do about being generous to their enemies, but to their friends they are treacherous and mean. Have you not sufficient evidence of their meanness and perfidy in this projected attack upon the Spanish nobility? A nation of shop-keepers! One cannot imagine the Emperor of the French stooping to so dastardly an outrage.'

'By the bones of Sant' Iago, Monsieur, you are right!' asseverated don Diegò. 'There are others on board yonder ship beside myself who are ready to take a just revenge on the infamous Velintòn without asking for reward. Nevertheless we are glad to know that the great Napoleon is on our side.'

'We are obliged to you, Señor, for showing us this interesting document,' said the Marquès, folding up the letter and handing it back to De Tremblaye. 'It is gratifying to know that in acting against Velintòn we have the support of the Emperor of the French.'

'It is plain we must determine at once on our next step,' said the Abbé.

Don Diego dotted the Abbé's i's for him.

'That is so. We must determine how and where we catch Velintòn.'

'Remember,' said De Tremblaye, 'that we can do nothing without the Condesa. I fear you will not persuade her to assist in an attempt on Velintòn's life.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Don Diego exploded in imprecations, but the Marquès checked him.

'I suppose,' suggested the Marquès, 'that if necessary we could carry Velintòn away with us on board our ship, landing in France or in South America?'

'That would at any rate be an excellent plan to lay before doña Ismena,' replied De Tremblaye. 'We need say nothing to her about any necessity which may arise to take a shorter way with her friend.'

'But how shall we bring about a reconciliation between him and my sister?' asked don Alonzo.

'On milord's side it will be very easy,' returned De Tremblaye. 'It must be your part, don Alonzo, and Marquès', to persuade your sister to invite him.'

'Let her write a note inviting him to ride out here to-morrow night,' suggested don Diego. 'And then - !'

He made a significant gesture.

De Tremblaye considered.

'A letter - that might be rather imprudent. Milord has more spies about him than our own. And so sudden a change of front might appear suspicious, even to him. I would suggest that since he is in the habit of walking on the Alameda with the Condesa, she should go there to-morrow and signify - she will know how - that she is disposed to be reconciled with him. If by any chance he does not appear, she must continue showing herself until he does. It will not be long. But let us not risk having any written evidence of the rendezvous in this place.'

THE SPANISH LADY

‘That appears an excellent plan,’ said the Marquès, ‘though I hope we shall not be kept longer than necessary on board that ship, where one is very ill-served and lodged. Let Alonzo fetch his sister. But listen! I hear someone coming.’

All looked round apprehensively.

The door opened and Ismena stood before them. She had evidently been weeping, but her tears had ceased to fall and with them the violence of her feelings had evaporated. She approached the Marquès, who had risen to receive her, and said in a small voice:

‘I beg your pardon a thousand times, Cousin. I am willing to do whatever you and my brother think right.’

CHAPTER X

LADY JANE and Miss Ashby were lodged in the Commander-in-Chief's quarters, which had been vacant when they arrived in Cadiz. It happened very felicitously for Harry and Ellen, that the rooms assigned to Lady Jane and her niece almost faced the room occupied by Harry, on the other side of a narrow street. Standing on her little green balcony, Ellen could see Harry shaving at the glass hung in his window: a sight which afforded the ill-behaved girl great amusement. Harry's hirsute growth was not enough to oblige him to shave regularly, which was perhaps the reason that he could not do so without making such very odd faces. When he put his head out of the window and Ellen stood on the balcony, they could easily talk to each other and arrange just when and where they would meet on the Alameda de Apodeca. That was the fashionable Promenade of Cadiz, where all the world met to gossip, flirt and intrigue.

No one knew of these private communications between the green balcony and the opposite window, except Mrs. Matthews — or Mattie — Ellen's maid, and Cousin Jane, who pretended not to. Yet after the night of the ball, Harry felt some pricks of conscience with regard to them. He — they were behaving in a way to compromise Ellen; but he wouldn't be able to make her see it.

For two days after the ball Lady Jane and Miss

THE SPANISH LADY

Ashby had a riding engagement with Lord Wellington which prevented them from walking on the Alameda. This was really fortunate for Harry. He walked with the Condesa de Careno and successfully diverted her thoughts from the absent Great Man and her unfulfilled mission. She also diverted his thoughts from Ellen and his own situation, which was getting altogether too complex to suit him. Ismena's charms made him quite forget, while he was with her, that he was flirting 'to order.' It came naturally to do so. As to Ellen,- better to forget her temporarily, for he could not bear to think of her out riding in the suite of Lord Wellington - Miss Ashby, sitting her proud little Spanish steed so well. Her horse was grey and had a long tail that floated behind him when he galloped, and she had a grey veil floating from her beaver hat and a long bottle-green riding-habit. The handsome debonair Lord Fitzroy Somerset caracoled beside her on just such another prancing steed. Good Lord! To think that was little Nellie, whom he had never before seen on anything better than her rough pony, unless it was his grandfather's old hunter. But she'd chirrup the pony along at a good pace, aided by an occasional smack from her hunting-crop, putting it over such obstacles as its short legs could jump and dragging it through others which they could not. Harry could see the pair of them now, scrambling muddy and draggled from a wet ditch and a thorn hedge, like a pair of terriers out of a rabbit-burrow. His foolish

THE SPANISH LADY

young heart felt aggrieved at the emergence of this butterfly Miss Ashby from that chrysalis Nellie. But she was still Nellie when they played at being in the schoolroom at Morningfold, or exchanged endearing insults between the window and the green balcony.

On the third morning after the ball he felt it impossible to keep away from the window. At the accustomed hour he put his head out and in a minute Ellen was on the green balcony. To his relief he heard that his lordship would not be riding that day; so they arranged to meet on the Alameda. Then Ellen went down to the salon and studied her Spanish.

About noon an officer's wife made a formal call on Lady Jane Gervase. Lady Jane bore the infliction with dignity and politeness, but with an expression of self-restraint upon her face which, to those who knew it, was painful to witness. The visitor was a lady of the kind who wishes to know everything about everybody; but sometimes fails to do so.

'Cleopatra was in beauty at the ball, was she not?' she remarked.

'I am not acquainted with the lady, ma'am,' replied Lady Jane.

'Not know the Condesa de Careno? Oh, but I am sure you must!'

'I have been introduced to the Condesa by Lord Wellington,' returned Lady Jane. 'But I never knew her Christian name.'

THE SPANISH LADY

The visitor laughed.

'I don't neither. We call her Cleopatra because – well, because she's a charmer of warriors. Every one's very much interested to see she's made it up with the handsome Ensign again – What's-his-name – the boy in the Light Bobs. Of course he was madly in love with her a few weeks ago and she seemed to be with him; when all of a sudden she dropped him like a hot potato.'

'I know nothing about the lady' – Lady Jane had almost said 'the baggage' – 'except that I met her at the ball.'

The visitor smiled.

'Officers' ladies ought to be very grateful to the Condesa, I'm sure. Cadiz is such a pleasant place in winter. But I expect all the English will be on the move before long. Some of the gentlemen have been laying long odds on young Beaumont – yes, Beaumont's his name – and now they're claiming they've won. He was seen going off from the ball with the lady, in her coach, and did not reappear.'

Lady Jane frowned heavily at the visitor and extended a long finger towards the rather dark end of the room where Ellen Ashby was sitting silent, bright-eyed and observant.

'There is a young person present, ma'am,' said her ladyship in a hoarse whisper.

Unlike Lady Jane, Ellen knew her Shakespeare very well. Colonel Ashby and Dr. Beaumont read him much and would discuss his Plays together.

THE SPANISH LADY

She therefore understood the allusion to Cleopatra. That her godfather, Cousin Arthur, past forty and with silver hair on his temples, could figure as Anthony, did not occur to her very youthful mind. When Harry was first alluded to, vaguely, the faint rose colour in her cheeks deepened perceptibly. When his name was actually mentioned, the words – 'It's a falsehood – I'm sure it is!' rushed to her lips; but she restrained them.

The visitor was vastly amused. Lady Jane Gervase was such an old Quiz. As to the little Ashby, every one knew she was a bold ill-brought-up Miss.

'I'm sure I beg your ladyship's pardon,' she replied, putting up her spying-glass and turning it on Ellen. 'I hope I've not said anything to shock Miss Ashby, though to be sure she's blushing. She's such a self-possessed young lady that really one forgets she is a young person.'

Lady Jane bowed her head majestically. She was so bored that she could think of nothing else, and did not notice the touch of malice in her visitor's apology.

The visitor left, gratified at having administered a pinprick to the little heiress – whose chief crimes were probably her wealth and other advantages – and ready to give an amusing description of Lady Jane at the next house she visited.

No sooner was she gone than Ellen flared up.

'Horrid woman! How dare she tell such lies about Harry!'

'Lord, yes, my dear,' replied Lady Jane cheerfully,

THE SPANISH LADY

her spirits raised by the visitor's departure. "'Tis most likely not true.'

'Most likely?' cried Ellen, anguish breaking through her wrath. 'Of course it's not true! If the least bit of it were true – if Harry were really – But I'm certain it's a lie.'

'Why, of course 'tis most likely a lie,' returned Lady Jane, with a calmness which further irritated Ellen. 'Them kind of women generally tell lies. But if it were true, my dear, it a'n't a thing to make such a hullabaloo about.'

'I'm not making a hullabaloo,' returned Ellen coldly. 'I simply say that if Harry really loves me he can't be in love with somebody else at the same time. He can go off to his Spanish lady if he chooses. I shan't want him.'

If Lady Jane had been a good guardian, she would have encouraged her ward's threatening attitude towards the ineligible Ensign. But she was not.

'Tut, tut, my dear!' she exclaimed. 'It a'n't proper for young ladies to know about such things. Damn that hell-cat of a woman, coming here making a disturbance! But you may take this from me. If one of these foreign baggages – and they're all baggages – throws herself at a young man's head, you can't expect him to say "No" to her. It a'n't in Nature.'

Ellen set her face, forcing herself to be calm.

'I expect it's all stories,' she said. 'I shall ask Harry.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Good God, Ellen!' shrieked Lady Jane. 'You'd never do that! You can't, my girl! You mustn't! Girls don't do such things.'

'I don't care – I can't help it,' returned Ellen, devastated and obstinate. 'There's no one else can tell me the truth except Harry. I shall ask him whether he's in love with this Spanish lady, and if he can't tell me "honest injun" he's not – why, of course I shall break off our engagement.'

Lady Jane rubbed her nose and capitulated.

'It's most improper, my girl, but I'll allow it's pretty sensible. I mean about asking the lad himself. As to breaking off your engagement you can't, for you a'n't engaged, and if you do your Cousin Arthur will say it's dam' sensible of you and all the better.'

So Ellen went to her room and cried a little.

CHAPTER XI

SENTRIES on either side of the gates indicated the Quarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies. The large wooden gates opened into a narrow street of tall houses running down to the Alameda de Apodeca. The street itself was in shadow, but on one side the bright winter sun drew a sharp line across the upper part of the houses. It dazzled on their whiteness, picked out the green of shutters and of balconies, some open, others glazed. The sentries, two patches of scarlet, struck a note of vivid colour in the cool shadow below. At the top the street had no visible end. It meandered away, was lost. At the bottom it was cut off, ended sharply in a clear, narrow section of the world: a section of blue sky, of the low opposing hills, of the blue shining waters of the bay, the quay with a palm-tree on it and people passing to and fro, silhouettes against the brightness beyond. Somewhere there a guitar was twanging, castanets clashing.

The small door in the big wooden gates opened, and two soldiers came out. One was a sergeant in the Highland kilt, the other a corporal in the English scarlet. They walked down to the end of the street. Their silhouettes, the Highlander's swinging kilt, the massive squareness of the corporal, vanished round the left-hand corner. There they joined a group of British soldiers drawn together by the sound of the guitar. A man and a woman in the

THE SPANISH LADY

picturesque peasant dress, but fresher and cleaner than usual, began to dance. These Andalusians had discovered that the *Rubios* – strange beings – were generous with money if you did something, no matter what, before asking for it. They did not give much to beggars, except to the old ones. As to those young persons who begged in the local manner, that is with derisive yells, such must expect to receive nothing except a smack or two with a stick or otherwise.

From the place where the street ended, the Alameda ran to the left; a double avenue of trees, flanked by groves of palms and bay-trees. And there in the twig-trellised sunshine, half Cadiz was sauntering, standing, sitting: a crowd such as will never rejoice the eyes of those whose lot is cast in the Ugly Century. Slowly they moved, the graceful Gaditanas, with the old Andalusian walk, swaying a little from the hips. Not one, rich or poor, but wore the black Spanish walking-dress; the mantilla over the high comb, the short silk *basquina*, showing trim ankles and small, high-insteped feet. Through the wavings of their fans, flashed or languished their black Arab eyes. And all the men had the stately toga-like cloak, black, brown or blue, flung round them, over civilian dress or gaudy uniform. All except the peasants and muleteers who, bent on business or pleasure, went by with coloured kerchiefs tied over their heads, in their differing delightful and convenient costumes. Priests were there in numbers and even a few monks: here and there British soldiers

THE SPANISH LADY

and officers. Above the hum of talk came the shrill cry of a ragged boy, pushing on with a dripping basket of live crabs on his head – '*Boca fresca de la Isla!*' – or the 'Fire! Excellent fire!' of the itinerant fire-seller, brandishing his burning rope-end.

The city lay half across the entrance of the bay, looking back at it. Just in the entrance a British sloop-of-war was setting all her white sails to the southerly breeze and beginning to lift to the live waters of the ocean. Inland the bay curved rapidly away into dim distance, like a great peaceful lake; blue water, white ports and villages powdered along its edge, and beyond that mauve sierras jaggling the far blue sky.

The British soldiers stood smoking *cigarillos*, looking on. The guitar-player was thrumming his thin music, joyous or sad – which was it? His companions danced their endless graceful dance, the woman clashing her castanets and sometimes singing, a little hoarsely, a nasal, quivering, passionate song. There was something strange and hot in the song; a savour as of Oriental spices. The soldiers listened in silence.

Some muleteers from the northern mountains, long-limbed hardy fellows, with flapping hats, leathern jerkins and short wide breeches, stopped also to look on at the dance. It was different from their own. They lighted their *cigarillos* at the fire-seller's rope and sat down on the wall at the quay's edge.

THE SPANISH LADY

Some projecting houses made a little plaza of this part of the quay, and across an open window of one of these houses an orange silk shawl hung over a string, by way of a curtain. A lightly-clad woman, glossy black hair loose about her fine brown shoulders, lifted it with a bare arm and, showing her white teeth in a smile, threw an orange at the soldiers. It did not hit them. It hit a large ruby velvet bonnet, with white feathers, worn by a tall Englishwoman who happened to be issuing out of the street, with the stride of a Grenadier. She was accompanied by a slip of a thing in a grey pelisse trimmed with swans-down, and a white beaver hat. The tall lady started, uttered an unladylike ejaculation, and picking up the orange, hurled it back. It struck the lady of the orange shawl full in the face. The shawl dropped over a shrill cry of '*Ave Maria purissima!*'

Lady Jane uttered a short, barking laugh.

'That'll teach the impudent hussy!' she exclaimed; and seizing Ellen's wrist in an iron grip, hurried her towards the Alameda.

The soldiers, who had stood respectfully at the salute while the ladies from Headquarters were passing by, now gave way to discreet mirth.

'Rum old gal!' chuckled a Cockney.

'Didn' her up wi' her hand and let drive!' grinned a rustic recruit. 'I reckon her've spailt the beauty o' yon sassy wench for a week o' Sundays.'

'It maun be admitted,' observed Mackenzie, the Scottish sergeant, 'that her leddyship carried aff the

THE SPANISH LADY

honours o' war in that skairmish. I'm thinking if she were a sharp-shooter o' the Light Bobs, she'd put a gran' few o' the enemy hordy-combaa, as they say.'

While the soldiers were thus 'making themselves good blood' over Lady Jane's exploit, they were also turning their eyes towards the window of the orange shawl. But the hussy did not reappear. Two muleteers crossed the quay and addressed the Cockney, who was standing on the edge of the group. The Cockney listened to the muleteers gravely and with an air of intelligence. With the same air of grave intelligence, he proceeded to fire off at them rapidly the whole of his Spanish vocabulary, which consisted mainly of the names — more or less — of articles of food and drink. With so expressive an intonation was this jargon delivered, that, listened to with half an ear, it might easily have passed for an intelligible Spanish speech. Having sufficiently bewildered the unfortunate muleteers, the Cockney approached Mackenzie, indicating them with a contemptuous thumb.

'Look 'ere, Sergeant,' he said. 'Blast me if I can make these 'ere Guy Fauxes understand a word o' their own langvidge. You've got the patter. I'll jest introdooce 'em to you.'

'I'll mak' shift to communicate with the parties,' returned the Sergeant, 'though I'm thinkin' these Spanish southerners are a wee bit like yersels in England. For ye ken, ye treat your worrds like lollipops,

THE SPANISH LADY

keepin' them in your mouths and suckin' half o' them away before ever ye let them out o't.'

Taking out a large coloured handkerchief, Sergeant Mackenzie wiped his lips carefully with it, and addressed the muleteers. He found himself able to understand them.

'Sefior,' said one, 'have the goodness to show us El Lord Velintòn.'

'Why do you want to see him?' asked the Sergeant suspiciously.

'*Per Dios!*' exclaimed the other. 'How should we not want to see the Hero of Salamanca, the Conqueror of the Frènnch?'

The first continued, warming to his theme:

'We come, Sefior, from Zamora, many leagues away. We cannot return without having seen El Lord, the great Velintòn.'

'What are they saying?' asked the Cockney.

The Sergeant interpreted. The Cockney sniggered.

'Tell 'em to find the prettiest woman on the Alameda. Every one knows who that is. And I'll wager a week's pay, wherever that Spanish lady's to be seen, Nosey won't be far off.'

'His lordship was at the table in his room when I come out,' said Marsland stiffly. 'Quite took up with his maps and things he was. Cursed me up and down he did, for going in with a message from Colonel Stuart. You might tell these gentry, Mackenzie, that if they want to see Lord Wellington,

THE SPANISH LADY

they'd best keep a-looking at that window. I've noticed when his lordship's studyin', he've got a 'abit of walking up to it and looking out.'

The Sergeant having given the muleteers such information as seemed good to him, they passed on. They paused under the windows of the British Headquarters and lifted up deep voices in patriotic song:

*'España de la Guerra
Tremola su pendon
Contra el poder infame
Del gran Napoleon.'*

In a moment a score of other voices were joining in; then more and more, till the song rolled far along the Alameda, the volume of sound swelling as it went. Sure enough an upright figure in British uniform appeared at a window. An English soldier pointed it out to the muleteers. 'There's your Velintòn.' They dropped their song and begun to shout, 'Viva Velintòn!' Others joined in the shout. 'Viva El Lord! Viva! Viva!' The figure at the window saluted once or twice stiffly, unsmilingly, and disappeared.

Meanwhile the Cockney soldier was making his comments.

'That's all werry well, my sons. You does the shoutin' and we does the fightin'.'

A small Spaniard, with big black eyes and neatly dressed in black, replied in fluent Gibraltese English:

THE SPANISH LADY

'That is not true, sir. This city of Cadiz resisted Marshal Victor for two years.'

'But they 'ad to wait for us to come and drive Mounseer Victor away for 'em,' retorted the Cockney.

'You perhaps do not know about Saragossa?' questioned the Spaniard sarcastically.

'Cawn't say vether I was ever there or not,' replied the Cockney. 'I've been marchin' and counter-marchin', adwancin' and retreatin' and settin' to partners vot didn't set to us, like as if we wos all dancin' a bloody quadrille, over the 'ole of your blasted country, till I don't rightly know where I 'ave been and where I 'aven't. Say it again, my chicken.'

José — for the Spaniard was José, Wellington's valet — seemed about to give way to a paroxysm of rage, but he restrained himself.

'You are an ignorant man. You know nothing about the Spaniards and you tell lies about them.'

The Cockney jerked his thumb in the direction of the Sergeant.

'You ask the Sergeant there. 'E vos at Talavera. Did the Spaniards run or did they not?'

He spat indignantly in the dust.

'Ou, ay! I'll not say but I was at Talavera,' replied the Sergeant cautiously, 'and at Barrosa and Albuera too. And I mind at Albuera there was a ween Spanish nobleman sittin' in his coach at the rear o' the regiment whilk he was supposed to com-

THE SPANISH LADY

mand. And I saw Marshal Beresford, that's a gran' big gentleman, stand by the coach and desire the Spanish officer to get out and take the head o' his regiment. And at the last, findin' worrds were of no avail, the Marshal pulled the fine nobleman officer richt oot o' his coach, carried him in his arms like a wee dolly and set him doon in front o' his men. But whether the puir creature stayed there or not is mair than I can tell ye, for I had a pressin' engagement mysel'.'

'That's it,' remarked Marsland. 'The Spaniards wouldn't be the bloody bad troops they are if they'd let us officer them.'

José could restrain himself no longer.

'Have you never heard of Bailèn?' he shrieked, waving a bouquet of carnations he was carrying over his head until the head of one fell off. 'Have you never heard of the great bloody victory - '

A female voice cut short the discussion.

'Tut, tut, Mr. Joseph! Don't you vex yourself with what these common soldiers say. Hignorant - that's what they are. I'm surprised at you, Corporal Marsland, that still call yourself a Horderly of Lord Wellington's, though he *has* loaned you circumstantially to my lady - I'm surprised, I am, that you should lend yourself to baiting and 'umiliating his lordship's own gentleman.'

The lady who spoke with so much authority was a tall fine blonde, in the thirties. She was elegantly dressed in grey silk, with a bonnet to match.

THE SPANISH LADY

'I warn't doin' nothin' to Mr. Joseph, Mrs. Matthews,' rejoined Marsland sulkily. 'I was just a-sayin' what all the officers say about the untrustworthiness of Spanish troops.'

Marsland straightened his uniform and approached the lady.

'I suppose, ma'am, 'er ladyship's expectin' of us to go on parade.' He offered his arm. 'Left foot forward, if you please, Mrs. Matthews, and slow march.'

Mrs. Matthews smiled, with some satisfaction.

'I thank you, Corporal, but this evening Mr. Joseph has begged me to favour him with a *paseo* on the Promenade.'

Marsland had been grumbling to his mates about his enforced attachment to Miss Ashby's waiting-maid. But perhaps he was not as averse to the arrangement as he pretended, for Mrs. Matthews was a fine woman and as well-dressed as any lady on the Alameda. At any rate to have another thus openly preferred to him was humiliating. He turned to his comrades.

'Look here, lads! Here's an English female what's not content to walk with an English soldier, but goes gadding with one of these 'ere dons. Look at 'im! — José had gone to the opening of the Alameda to await his partner — 'about the size o' one o' them big Spanish fleas, what recruits takes for the Devil the first time they sees one on 'em.'

Something about the back of the little black-coated

THE SPANISH LADY

man made the comparison seem apt, and the soldiers laughed heartily.

'Mr. Joseph's size is neither here nor there,' rejoined Mrs. Matthews, with dignity. 'He is a Spanish gentleman, courteous and refined in his manners; which is more than can be said of our British common soldiers.'

'Eh, mem, ye're mebbe richt,' observed Sergeant Mackenzie. 'But I ken whilk o' the twa ye'd preferr to have next to ye if ye were hearin' a ween French bullets come whinin' past yer ears.'

'Or a squadron of French cavalry coming down on ye, yelling like twenty thousand devils,' continued a man of the 95th, with a long red scar on his neck.

'Ay, Mrs. Matthews,' added Marsland, 'you'd feel a deal more comfortable, ma'am, with a couple o' British elbows ticklin' your ribs than with a score o' dons.'

Mrs. Matthews faced her indignant countrymen calmly.

'I hope,' she said, 'as a true-born Englishwoman, I don't need to be informed that one Briton can fight three hothers of hany nationality. But'—here she raised her voice, looking in the direction whence the impatient José with his bouquet was again approaching—'for gentlemanliness and civility to ladies and general agreeableness, there's no Englishman can compare with a Spanish cavalero.'

José drew near, bowing deeply, one hand upon his heart, the other presenting the bouquet.

THE SPANISH LADY

'I have here, madam, a few poor flowers, unworthy of your beautiful hands, which I beg you nevertheless to accept.'

Both he and Mrs. Matthews were pleased with this carefully coined speech, and even the Sergeant observed that a guid Scots laddie would probably not have turned it so well.

'Deeds before words,' said the Cockney, with a wink. 'There's a werry marked inclination among Spanish females of all ranks to desert to the British arms.' He pantomimed an embrace, emphasized by a loud kiss in the air.

'Contrariwise, too,' observed the soldier of the 95th. 'There's young Beaumont of ours has gone over bag and baggage to the Spanish female forces, and I only 'ope the pretty young lady as he was a-courting 'as got a don to make 'er pretty speeches, same as 'er lady's-maid.'

Mrs. Matthews bestowed a look of sublime contempt on the soldiers and moved majestically away, beside her cavalero.

'Some on us think that nasty little black fellow ain't straight,' observed Marsland. 'But bless you! His lordship never won't worry about their bloody spies.'

The *Vivas* and the singing had ceased, damped down by that rigid apparition at the window. Mrs. Matthews sniffed delicately at her bouquet, in the classic attitude of the fashion-plate.

'I'm vastly obleeged to you, Mr. Joseph. Reely

THE SPANISH LADY

your flowers smell as sweet as the best perfumery. They're a vulgar lot, our common soldiers, but I hope you will not resent the remark, if I say that Lord Wellington himself is no model of manners or morals either.'

José looked up, a sudden gleam in his black eye.

'You do not love El Lord, then, Mees?'

'Love Lord Wellington!' – she tossed her head – 'I don't believe any woman born ever loved that man. And the way he treats you, Mr. Joseph! I'm sure my heart often bleeds for you.'

José flushed, there was a sudden moisture in his black eyes. Female sympathy is so touching.

'He treats me like a dog, Mees – me, a pure Castilian, *sí*, Señora! – a gentleman.'

'Anyone can see you're a gentleman, Mr. Joseph,' responded Mrs. Matthews. 'He's a brute, that's what he is. I'm not accustomed to damning here and sending to the devil there. I've always lived with real Quality, but God-fearing gentlemen, that wouldn't suffer blasphemous language or goings-on in their houses. And the way he's behaving about young Mr. Beaumont, as I've known from his childhood, and the nicest young gentleman I ever see! If he sends Master Harry away he'll break my little lady's heart, he will. I hate the man!'

'You hate Lord Velintòn?' asked José in a low eager voice. 'That is right. I hate him too.'

He looked anxiously round and added almost in a whisper: 'But we must not say so. Oh, no!'

THE SPANISH LADY

'And why not, pray?' asked Mrs. Matthews. 'There's no law against it. I might say I hated the King, God bless him, or the Archbishop of Canterbury, if I chose. It ain't blasphemy or perjury. He's a bad man, is his lordship, and ought to know better at his age and position, than lead young men astray with his Condesas and gallivantings, that all the world knows of.'

José had been quite unable to follow Mrs. Matthews' line of attack upon the Commander-in-Chief, but its general tone of bitterness and indignation warmed his heart. It caused him to enter on the path of indiscretions.

'You would like his lordship to have a nice trick played upon him?' he chuckled in her ear. 'You would like him to get what you call a good ducking when he goes to see the Condesa de Careno?'

'That I should!' exclaimed Mrs. Matthews. 'A good ducking's just what he deserves.'

'Well, that is what will happen to him,' returned José. 'One time he goes to the Quinta, it is not in the beautiful Ismena's arms he will find himself, but in the cold, cold water, where the little fishes will swim round and bite him. Will not that make you laugh?'

He was whispering low and eagerly, and as he whispered he smiled. Mrs. Matthews did not like that smile. In spite of her affectations, she was a clever woman. Her mind worked rapidly. She remembered that Marsland had once told her that

THE SPANISH LADY

General Alava, who ought to know his own countrymen, suspected José of being a spy. She had spurned the suggestion at the time, attributing it to her official fiancé's official jealousy. Now she remembered it. Long experience of service in large households had taught Mrs. Matthews self-control and a useful amount of guile.

'Lor, Mr. Joseph!' she giggled, 'that would be a good joke. I've heard his lordship say he don't fancy sea-bathing. It's my belief he can't swim.'

José continued, with a yet more sinister smile:

'Why should he swim? Do you want to see his ugly big nose bobbing up out of the sea? No, no!'

She feigned amusement.

'You don't mean to say that hussy of a Condesa's going to play him such a trick as that? Well, I should laugh!'

Here José stopped his confidences with an abruptness which made them suspicious. He shrugged his shoulders.

'*Quien sabe?* That is only her little joke – my little joke I am telling you. I only make fun of his lordship, who thinks because he is a great man, pretty ladies must love him and his big nose. Caramba, no! They love the blond young man – Mr. Harry, as you call him.'

'Ho! Do they the baggages!' exclaimed Mrs. Matthews with irrepressible indignation. Then recovering herself, continued, 'But it ain't surprising,

THE SPANISH LADY

Mr. Joseph, for as I was saying, Mr. Harry's a pleasant-spoken young gentleman, and for looks there ain't many to match him — although, being a blonde myself, I have always preferred dark gentlemen, and for heyes, give me the Spanish!

Mr. Joseph replied with suitable compliments and the conversation drifted into the channels of gallantry. But Mrs. Matthews determined to find a suitable opportunity for leading it back to the subject of Lord Wellington, the Condesa de Careno and Mr. Harry.

Mrs. Matthews' interest in Harry Beaumont and Ellen Ashby was of long standing. She came from the parish of Morningfold and had first left it at fourteen to take service in a family of French *émigrés*, living at Brighton. While with them she had picked up a fair knowledge of French and good taste in dress. Some years later Harry had arrived at his grandfather's house, a beautiful motherless child, and she had returned to Morningfold to be his nurse. She had left it for the house of a relative of Dr. Beaumont's, a Member of Parliament, in London. As Harry went to school at Westminster, she had remained in touch with him there. Ellen Ashby occupied a place in her affections second only to Harry's. Mrs. Matthews was no ordinary lady's maid; but it is to be feared that it was not the quickness of her intelligence so much as the elegance of her appearance which had attracted Lord Wellington's Spanish valet. And he felt sure the fine blonde

THE SPANISH LADY

was in love with him. But in fact Mrs. Matthews' preference for Mr. Joseph's society was due partly to an intelligent interest in foreigners and partly to indignation at Lady Jane's imposition upon her of Corporal Marsland in the character of a fiancé.

CHAPTER XII

NEITHER Harry nor Ellen looked forward to their meeting on the Alameda with unalloyed delight. For two days he had been carrying on what in England might have been an innocuous if hot flirtation with Ismena. But his campaigns in Spain had taught him a little about Spanish women. He was just-aware that although the gayest and most charming of flirts, the limits of flirtation with them were soon reached – and overpassed. He knew what Ellen would think of it, and wished Alava back.

Lady Jane had uttered tremendous threats beforehand as to the strict chaperonage she was going to exercise over Ellen on the Alameda: especially with regard to Harry Beaumont, whose attentions Cousin Arthur disapproved. Very soon, however, she met two old cronies – Tom This, who had risen to be a General, and Dick That, who, though grey-haired and covered with honourable scars, had never been able to purchase himself higher rank than that of a Captain. Borne away on a tide of reminiscence, Lady Jane rapidly forgot that she was a chaperon. When Ellen saw Harry coming slowly through the throng and his eyes met hers, her horrid suspicions melted away like snow in the sun: temporarily at least. Like the ill-behaved girl she was, she slipped behind her chapéron and signalled to Harry to join her.

‘Look out!’ she said, in a low voice, with her

THE SPANISH LADY

schoolgirl giggle. 'Cousin Jane's very stern to-day. She's had Orders from Headquarters to enforce the regulations concerning chaperonage. Luckily she's forgotten all about me for the present. So come along. Let's get away somewhere.'

'We can't possibly do that, Nellie,' he returned, thinking bitterly of those Orders from Headquarters.

'I know what you're going to say,' she returned. 'It's not proper. Isn't it downright silly of them to suppose that at our age, when we've known each other all our lives, we can begin to "behave proper" to each other? Fudge! But I promise you, I'll behave ever so proper with other gentlemen.'

Here she smiled up at him, with so engaging a dimple in her cheek, that Harry could not help ejaculating under his breath, but emphatically—'Darling!'

Then Ellen suddenly recollected the visitor's allegations, and added defiantly:

'At any rate I'll be just as proper behaved with other gentlemen as you are with other ladies.'

At this absurd remark the Elder Brother attitude in Harry reappeared: or an uneasy conscience made him on his defence.

'Don't talk nonsense, Nell,' he said. 'That's quite a different thing. Nobody expects a man to be as proper-behaved as a young lady. They wouldn't want him to be.'

'I should,' retorted Ellen.

'You'd think me a most infernal ass if I were.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'I shouldn't.'

His only reply was a grunt, such as he used sometimes to indulge in at Morningfold. It was an expressive grunt, which implied his opinion as a boy of girls as girls. A sudden chill had fallen upon them, as when a dark cloud abruptly covers the sun on a Spring day. They walked on in silence, Harry a little behind Ellen, in the rear of Lady Jane. The fortunate General had moved on, having, after the manner of the fortunate, found more friends. The unfortunate Captain was still walking with her. Their heads were close together and both were absorbed in the tale of the good fellow's grievances. At length Ellen smiled over her shoulder, a rather wan smile, at Harry.

'Won't you ask me to "un-tire" myself? The Spanish ladies always do, don't they?'

'Most of the time,' returned Harry, cheered by the smile. 'You see they're tired directly they get up and we're not tired till we lie down.'

'Do let us be Spanish!' exclaimed Ellen. 'Let us *descansar* ourselves on that nice seat under the palms.'

Harry knew this would be highly indiscreet. But there was Ellen smiling up at him with that dear little dimple in a cheek that was rather pale, and with a shadow of plaintiveness, of reproach in her bright eyes. A reproach which he knew to be not quite undeserved. So they slipped away from behind the oblivious Lady Jane and seated themselves

THE SPANISH LADY

on a stone bench, at right angles to the main avenue, shaded by tall palms and half hidden by low ones.

Ellen knew what she wanted to say to Harry – and what she wanted him to say to her. She wanted him to tell her it was all an invention about his making love to that Spanish lady. Of course he wouldn't have done it, when he was engaged to her. For they were engaged, whatever the old Lord Chancellor, or even Cousin Arthur, might say. It had seemed very simple beforehand to ask him a plain question; but when it came to the point, it seemed very difficult. She was wasting the precious moments in banalities.

'Look at Mattie!' she exclaimed. 'Doesn't she look a stunner in her smart London bonnet? She's carrying on a tremendous flirtation with José.'

'What! Mattie?' asked Harry. 'I thought she and Marsland were engaged to each other.'

Ellen laughed.

'By Order of the Governor – that is, Cousin Jane. So of course they hate each other. I don't believe Mattie would flirt with José if it weren't for Marsland. But he tells her all sorts of things about Godpapa Arthur, and she tells me. It's such fun.'

'What does the Peer want with a Spanish valet?' asked Harry, remembering Alava's suspicions.

Ellen laughed again.

'He says José's the only man who really understands packing boots. You know Cousin Arthur's got dozens and dozens of pairs of boots, and he loves them passionately.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Is that all Mattie has to tell you about your Cousin Arthur?' asked Harry. He was about to add, 'Hasn't she told you his lordship is not going to allow an impudent Ensign to run off with you and your money?' – but he hesitated. While he hesitated, Ellen answered his question.

'Oh, no! She talks all sorts of mysterious nonsense about his being a great deal too fond of the Condesa de Careno. Of course the Condesa's brilliant and beautiful, but so are his boots, and I'm sure he loves his boots best. Fancy Cousin Arthur in love! At his age and with Cousin Kitty at home too! Ridiculous!'

At the mention of the Condesa de Careno's name, Harry's unfortunate complexion betrayed him as usual. He went bright pink up to the roots of his fair hair. Ellen saw that and was suddenly impelled to speak.

'People say you're in love with her too, Harry. Is that true? Because if it is –'

There was a lump in Ellen's throat. She stopped to swallow it and wink the intruding moisture from her eyes.

'If it is – I'd better know. That's all.'

Her tone had become slightly aggressive. If it had not been, if she had allowed her tears to fall instead of swallowing them, perhaps Harry would have answered her differently.

'If you listen to servants' gossip –'

'It wasn't a servant.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Gossip of that kind, you can't have much faith in me. I did see something of the Condesa de Careno before you came out, but I hadn't so much as spoken to her since, until the night of the ball.'

'And did you have a tender interview with her at the ball, and go home with her in her carriage?'

Ellen had never meant to say that. The gossiping visitor's words must have made a deep impression on her subconsciousness, for now out they came, to her own surprise and chagrin. Harry was startled and shocked as well as angered. Intimately as he knew Ellen, it was impossible for his masculine mind to conceive the extreme innocence with which she repeated the by no means innocent gossip of the visitor.

'Upon my word, Nell!' he exclaimed, 'you appear to be picking up some pretty notions from your aristocratic friends. I refuse to answer such questions. The Condesa de Careno is a friend of mine and also, you must remember, a friend of—'

Here Harry stopped dead. His jaw fell. The man, the very great-man whose name was on his lips, stood before them. Harry leapt to his feet and saluted. Ellen also rose precipitately. Lord Wellington looked displeased.

'What are you doing here, Ellen? Where's Lady Jane?' he asked curtly.

'She—she's somewhere on the Alameda, sir,' replied Ellen.

'Then we will go and find her,' he returned; and offered his arm to his goddaughter, who took it

THE SPANISH LADY

meekly. On Harry, who was standing by dumb-founded, he cast a look of haughty disapproval, even contempt. 'It was not the conduct of a gentleman, sir,' he said, 'to induce Miss Ashby to leave her chaperon and sit here alone with you.'

'He didn't, sir, indeed he didn't!' cried Ellen the Bold. 'I wanted to.'

For all her boldness, though, she was trembling before her august godfather.

'I daresay you did,' rejoined Lord Wellington dryly. 'You are a child. I repeat it was not the part of an officer and a gentleman to take advantage of your ignorance.'

He turned on his heel and marched Ellen off, patting the little hand that lay on his arm and giving her fatherly instructions in the Regulations for Young Ladies. Harry was left to his reflections.

CHAPTER XIII

THE wound of his rupture with Ismena did not cease to ache at the back of Lord Wellington's mind. Just because of that he threw himself with renewed ardour into every kind of business, civil and military. If he had twice ridden to San Fernando at the hour when he had been accustomed to meet her on the Alameda, the rides were not purposeless. He had business there. He rode at full gallop all along the Isthmus, only drawing rein occasionally to breathe the horses. Ellen pronounced riding with her godfather 'great fun.' Lady Jane pretended to enjoy it. Lord Fitzroy Somerset was inured to his Chief's pace, but under present circumstances would have liked longer pauses, to admit of more conversation with Miss Ashby. Her untutored manners were quite attractive when one got used to them and realized what a child she was, in spite of her seventeen years.

Galloping hard along the straight road or shut up alone in his room, Wellington's thoughts were intensely occupied, wrestling with a particular problem: the plan of his coming campaign. This was complicated by the difficulty of deciding how much truth there was in the persistent rumours of a disaster to the French Army in Russia. He had had a dreadful suspicion that in some subtle way his passion for Ismena was numbing his volition, his intellectual faculties. Try as he would he had been unable to

THE SPANISH LADY

make up his mind. But the secret pain had not impeded his mental processes as the secret delight had done. Decision was returning; a plan was shaping itself.

During these rides, though Wellington paid little attention to his companions, he liked to have Ellen and Lord Fitzroy riding close behind him. Her cheerful young voice and rippling laughter were strangely pleasant in the ears of the Great Man. The sound of them flowed over the surface of his mind like a thin bright wave over a dark rock. Perhaps that unacknowledged wound of his craved some touch of the Eternal Feminine to soothe its pain. From time to time he would turn and smile at the girl.

It was now nearly twenty-four hours since the Commander-in-Chief had left his room. He had been writing or brooding over maps. In his fits of abstraction he would occasionally walk to the window and stare out at the Alameda, the bay, the distant hills, without seeing anything. It was in such a mood that he had strayed to the window when the *Vivas* of the crowd had risen to greet him. He had awoke almost with a start to these; and had also become aware of Ismena standing in the crowd crying out *Vivas* with the rest. And her handkerchief had come out and fluttered towards him. Surely a white dove of Peace! After that he felt it difficult to concentrate his thoughts. He decided that a short walk was what he wanted.

THE SPANISH LADY

Covering his uniform with a cloak, he went out by a side door and managed to slink across the Alameda unobserved. He walked along by the sea-wall, plantations dotted between him and the fashionable promenade. It was thus he had chanced on Harry and Ellen, sitting under the palm-trees. It was not, however, Ellen or Lady Jane he had been seeking when his keen eyes had from time to time scrutinized the crowd on the Alameda, from the shelter of a grove. But he now walked between the two ladies, protecting himself thus against inopportune conversationalists, until he found the person he sought. He then left them, Lady Jane assisting them to go with more tact than he would have expected of her.

The Condesa de Careno had just risen from where she had been sitting enthroned, surrounded by the homage of half a dozen gentlemen of Spain. As Wellington approached her, that proud heart which had never hurried its beat beneath the enemy guns, beat a little faster. With surprise and shame he noted the violence of his own emotions, as he at once sought to meet her eyes and shrunk from doing so. Would pride and anger speak from them, or ~~that~~ warm gentleness which he mistook for Love? In a fit of cowardice he had almost turned abruptly and left her there with her hidalgos, those futile inheritors of splendid names whom from his soul he despised. And just at that moment her eyes did meet his, and in them was an imploring humbleness, a sweet recall: Slowly he approached her. In the growing

THE SPANISH LADY

warmth of that look his heart opened to a renewal of delight. He did not notice what became of the *hidalgos*. They were gone when he reached her side. Forgetful of Spanish etiquette, he took her hand, bowed over it and kissed it. Many furtive eyes observed the Great Man's action. As a social incident it was shocking – as a political event, excellent. Ismena, drawing her mantilla half across her face, looked down and blushed. That was the inevitable reaction of a well-bred woman to such a breach of decorum. There followed a rush of triumph as transfiguring as Love. Rumours had been going about, reported to her by *doña* Pilar, that Velintòn had cast her off. He had found out that affair of hers with the young British officer, and was persecuting her family out of revenge. Now people might throw up their hands in horror at his behaviour, but they could no longer pretend that El Lord was not in love with her.

'No, *querido*, no!' she murmured, gently trying to withdraw the lovely hand. Still he held it fast in his strong grasp.

'You forgive me, Condesita – Ismena of my heart!'

The Conqueror breathed it with suppliant eyes, standing bare-headed before her.

'Do I forgive you, Arthur? I suppose I do – Yes; yes, of course I do. I cannot remember anything except that we love each other.'

She turned her luminous look full on him. A wave of enormous bliss struck him dumb. He made

THE SPANISH LADY

no reply, but turned his face away from her and stared through the trees at the sea.

'Good God!' he thought. 'She really loves me like that! It is incredible! And I worship every inch of her lovely body.'

Ismena knew El Lord well enough by this time to be aware that his silence, his averted face did not betoken indifference.

'Poor Lord!' she thought with a tolerant amusement. 'He is a lion in War, but in Words a fish – a fish out of water. Don't I hear him gasp?'

But her triumph was still too great for her to feel bored. The lion was hers and no one else's. Let the world mark that. Her pleasure was only marred by the knowledge that she had to catch the lion in a silken net. She did not like doing it, but her duty to the La Peña family must be done. And what would come of their plot if she succeeded? She felt doubtful and disquieted; but then she was only a woman and must do what her men judged to be for the best.

'*Dios mio*, your Excellency!' she exclaimed, with a flirt of the fan and an enchanting smile. 'I see you have already forgotten Spanish manners. I must teach you them once again. Will you not invite me to rest myself on this bench?'

'I will invite you to do anything on earth you desire, Condesita,' replied El Lord, his stern countenance illumined by a smile of delighted adoration, as he turned again towards her.

Reminded that he had sinned against her social

THE SPANISH LADY

code, his attitude now became one of distant courtesy.

Yet she saw by signs which she had learnt to read that his passion for her had not waned. It was as compelling as it had been in those early days at Madrid, when, in the first hour of his meeting with her, it had seized him as a flame seizes on dry wood, and because of its very violence, his pride and his humility had made him fear to avow it.

Ismena seated herself on the bench, arranging the silken folds of her *basquina* in such a way that the fringe parted to give the best view of the dainty foot and ankle.

'I invite your Excellency to lean on the back of my seat, if you are my *Cortejo*,' smiled she. 'But perhaps you are only an amiable friend. In that case you will stand here before me in a polite attitude.'

El Lord laughed silently, showing his strong white teeth.

'I am not at all amiable, Condesita. You must know that, and I am not your friend.'

He moved to the back of the bench, leaned over her, and whispered passionately:

'I am your lover, Ismenita *de mi cuore — creatura de mi alma*.'

Let it not be supposed that during these passages doña Pilar had neglected her duties as a duchess. She was not far from her charge when El Lord had so far forgotten himself as to kiss the Condesa's hand. She had marked her sense of the impropriety of his

THE SPANISH LADY

action by spreading an extensive fan between her face and the offender. But like Ismena she felt that reprehensible as was such behaviour, it gave a nice slap in the face to some ill-natured persons present.

She did not repine at receiving no salutation from El Lord. He was like that. The one thing that he desired of a dueña was that she should remove herself as quickly as possible. The good-natured creature did the best she could to oblige him by retreating into a grove behind the bench on which Ismena was seated. Then she brought out her rosary and fell to work to make up the decade of *Aves* which she had been given to recite in penance for one of her harmless peccadillos.

The Alameda was not a place where lovers could expect to find seclusion. The bench on which the Condesa was seated faced the main avenue. Mrs. Matthews and José occupied one not far off, at right angles to it and a little further back. Now Mr. Joseph's movements had not been so casual as they may have appeared. He had observed his master come on to the Alameda and had imitated him in unostentatiously seeking out the Condesa de Careno. He was rewarded by seeing evidence that there was a reconciliation between her and her important lover. But how far did it go? He knew enough of foreign manners to attach less importance than did the Andalusians to that kiss of the hand. Mrs. Matthews too was on the alert. Her keen eyes noted the subtle changes in Lord Wellington's countenance, usually

THE SPANISH LADY

so hard, with an instinctive perception only possible in a woman.

'Ay, she has got him again sure enough, the baggage!' Mrs. Matthews thought to herself. 'I wish I could get a bit more out of Mr. Joseph. I believe there is some hanky-panky going on at that country-house of hers. Not but what it would serve his lordship right if she did play him a trick. Still it wouldn't do if anything serious happened to him. No, that it wouldn't.'

Mrs. Matthews had time for these meditations because José on some polite excuse, had stolen away to speak to doña Pilar. Pilar was rather deaf, so that from where she stood she could not hear a word of what was passing between Ismena and her lover, but José's ears were sharp and he had cultivated the habit of listening to others while talking himself. Thus, while exchanging banal remarks with Pilar, he caught enough of what was passing between the Condesa and Lord Wellington to satisfy him that so far all was going well. She had regained her hold on El Lord.

But the time was short. José had received instructions to begin packing up. Would any woman alive entice Wellington away from his brooding over those scored maps? José's fortunes hung on the answer to that question. If only De Tremblaye's plan worked smoothly! When he, José, was taking his ease in his café in Madrid with plenty of money in his pocket, what would it matter to him what king sat on the

THE SPANISH LADY

throne, Ferdinand or Joseph? And as to El Lord, the brute of an Englishman would only get his deserts. Ismena rose and approached doña Pilar. José quickly shrunk behind a shrub, fearing to be espied by his master.

‘I want the key of the garden gate,’ said Ismena. Pilar had an immense bunch of keys hanging at her substantial waist, under her black satin mantilla. From this she loosed a small bunch and handed it to Ismena who slipped it into her reticule. She observed José and made him a little friendly sign. She then returned to her seat and, under cover of her extended fan, handed a key from her bunch to Wellington, who bestowed it carefully in an inner pocket.

‘You know the gate?’ she asked. ‘It leads into the orange-grove.’

‘Assuredly I know it, my treasure.’

‘You will find a hook in the wall outside. I beg you to fasten your horse up there. There might be other people in my stable this evening, and I should not wish them to see your horse there.’

‘But yes, Ismenita — I understand.’

It seemed to him natural enough that she should wish to conceal his presence at the Quinta. He himself would always have preferred that their meetings should be in that secluded garden-house, hidden away from all eyes.

‘You will be punctual?’ she said.

‘Punctual! What a word for you to use, *amiguita*! I thought it was not in your dictionary.’

THE SPANISH LADY

She paused a moment, embarrassed; then spoke lightly.

'You have taught it me, *querido*. I mean to have a very delicious dish for supper, and if you are late it will be spoiled. And you will come, will you not? You will not say you are too busy?'

'I hope not,' he returned. 'God knows I've been working hard enough these last three days, but I've got it now, *amighita*, I've got it!'

There was a note of triumph in his voice and he struck his boot with his cane, as though to underline the last phrase.

'I deserve to be a free man for a few hours.'

'Promise me! Promise!' she urged.

He hesitated, smiling at her a little sadly; then —

'I never promise,' he said, 'because I am never really a free man. But it will take a great deal to stop me from coming to you, *creatura de mi alma*.'

He rose and took a ceremonious farewell; turned away, turned back a moment, and looking in her eyes said in a very low voice:

'At eight o'clock, then.'

When Wellington was well away, Ismena beckoned to José and he came.

'All goes well, José! El Lord will come to the garden-house at the Quinta at eight o'clock this evening. Let my brother and Monsieur De Tremblaye know. I am dining with friends in Town and think it wiser to keep my engagement.'

Ismena might have successfully hidden that

THE SPANISH LADY

episode of the garden key from curious eyes on the Alameda in front of her; but she had entirely overlooked a very sharp pair of eyes on a cross bench not far off. Mrs. Matthews had observed it. She did not like it. She did not like Mr. Joseph's face when he returned to her after those few words with the Condesa. It was darkly flushed, his eyes glittered, and he wore a queer smile, which showed his canine teeth. So looked Primitive Man when he saw his enemy, man or brute, heading straight for the pit which he had dugged for him. Primitive Woman in Mrs. Matthews reacted. She was intuitively convinced that Mr. Joseph was up to no good. Primitive Woman smiled on her admirer with the refined smile of Mrs. Matthews.

'Well, you do look 'appy, Mr. Joseph! I believe that pretty Spanish lady has been making love to you as well as Lord Wellington — and a much better choice too.'

'I assure you, Señora, there has been nothing between us. The Condesa is fond of joking — she told me a very good joke.'

He was convulsed by silent laughter.

'Come now, Mr. Joseph! You might tell me your joke. You don't need to mind if it is against his lordship, for you know I can't abide the man. She's going to play him a trick — eh? Serve the brute right, say I.'

Mr. Joseph controlled his laughter. After looking all round, to be sure there was no one listening, he asked in a low voice:

THE SPANISH LADY

'Did you see El Lord with the Condesa? He looked a fool, did he not? And he is one. He goes to the Quinta this evening. He thinks he will enjoy very much his visit to the beautiful Ismena. He is mistaken.' José began to laugh again.

'You mean she'll chuck him into the water?' giggled Mrs. Matthews. 'Give him a cold bath, eh? Do him good too!'

José checked himself with a startled look.

'What do you mean? I do not know.'

'Well, I did hope that the Condesa was going to give him a ducking!' exclaimed Mrs. Matthews. 'I'm sure it would serve him well right if she did. A man of his age and position and a married man, too! Scandalous, I call it! But I'll be bound his Spanish lady will serve him out one way or another.'

José shook his head.

'She would like to — but I do not think she will dare. She must keep his lordship in a good temper for the sake of her papa and her brother, because he may do them harm if she does not. She must pretend to love him, the poor lady, although she loves someone else.'

Mrs. Matthews had to be content with the hint, the suggestion, she had already received.

'I am sorry you think so,' she returned. 'But it was a very good story you made up, Mr. Joseph, and we've had a good laugh over it, haven't we?'

'I try to make you laugh, Señora, and do not mind telling you stories about his lordship, because I

THE SPANISH LADY

know you do not like him any more than I do myself. Now with your permission we will return, for he may require my services.'

But Mrs. Matthews had no intention of immediately losing sight of the Condesa, so in spite of all that José, who was impatient to be off, could say, she remained at her post. Taking a bit of fine crochet from her pocket, she feigned absorption in her work.

Ismena had borrowed Pilar's rosary, on the pretext that she had many more *Aves* to say than the innocent Pilar. The Bishop passing by on the Alameda smiled at her and raised his hand in greeting. The Condesa de Careno was a most devout daughter of the Church. As to her sins, they were of the kind natural to her age and condition. God made men and women one way. The Church said they ought to be made another way. This was a mystery and it must be accepted as such, since evidently neither God nor the Church could err. But if men and women in general continued to be as God made them, it was not the part of the Church to be severe; especially in the case of a beautiful and high-born woman like the Condesa de Careno, who was necessarily exposed to more temptations than the homely.

Nor was it any sense of the general error of her ways which was inspiring the special devotion with which Ismena was reciting her decade of *Aves*. It was genuine compunction at the cruel deception which she was practising on her lover, and anxiety as to the outcome. The rosary was also useful in

THE SPANISH LADY

keeping acquaintances from engaging her in conversation, which she did not at the moment desire. But presently Mrs. Matthews saw her look up and make a sign to De Tremblaye who was sauntering in the Alameda. Accordingly he came up and spoke to her; and whatever it was she had to tell him, he appeared uncommonly pleased at it. Mrs. Matthews knew that De Tremblaye had the reputation with many of being a French spy. That his colloquy with the Condesa had nothing of gallantry in it, she was sure. Words, phrases, reached her from time to time: 'Milord' repeatedly, and once 'So far all goes well.' Her suspicions were strengthened; yet as a practical woman she was aware that she had no solid ground for them, nothing to tell which could justify them to anyone else.

CHAPTER XIV

HARRY BEAUMONT was unhappy. He was not used to being unhappy and hardly knew how to behave under the circumstances. Man delighted him not nor Woman either; but he, temporarily at least, preferred Man to Woman. So there being nothing else to do, he joined two very young officers, fresh from England, in their stroll on the Alameda. He did not talk much to them; but occasionally squashed their youthful enthusiasm for the mantillas, the scenery, the climate of Spain, by some utterance of mature cynicism.

In the course of their stroll he saw Ellen walking behind a chastened Lady Jane and Lord Fitzroy Somerset, who was wearing a brand-new uniform. It fitted so well, was padded to such perfection, that he looked like a great gorgeous tin soldier. He carried a gold-headed malacca cane in his hand and every now and then tapped his shiny boot, as though to call attention to its elegance. That was how Harry saw Lord Fitzroy – a Bond Street dandy. But perhaps Ensign Beaumont himself would have liked to be wearing a fine new uniform, instead of one which had suffered the misadventures of the Retreat from Ciudad Rodrigo and come out looking wonderfully neat and smart, considering. Without doubt he would have liked to be walking beside Ellen himself, looking down at her bright eyes and dear little dimple and laughing at what he would have called her ‘silly

THE SPANISH LADY

remarks.' For when they used to go to Brighton together for French and dancing lessons, they used to say to each other as they walked through the streets crowded with people of fashion, 'Now let's make silly remarks.' Then they would make absurd comments on the passers-by, and laugh consumedly at each other's wit. But Ellen ought not to make 'silly remarks' to other people. He was sure she was doing so now, from the mischievous look on her face and Lord Fitzroy's laugh. She had picked a quarrel with Harry and got him into Lord Wellington's black books: a pretty serious matter for any young officer. And there she was laughing and flirting with another man, as though he did not exist. His prospects in the Army were blighted and he was going to lose the only girl he would ever really love, however much he might philander with others. But after all, what did it matter? It was a hundred to one a French bullet would get him before this New Year was old.

He took his companions into the *Caballo Blanco*, where the good white wine of Xerez was on sale, and treated them. It was not brandied stuff, such as was sold in England, but it was heady enough notwithstanding. Harry was no drunkard, yet when he returned to the Alameda after drinking a health or two, he was not quite the same young man as when he left it. Lord Wellington, stepping quickly, passed the three young officers. He was going in the direction of Headquarters. He acknowledged their salutes slightly, but absorbed in his own thoughts,

THE SPANISH LADY

did not look round at them. Harry was not sorry for that. He and his companions turned in the opposite direction, and towards the end of the Alameda he noticed doña Ismena, sitting on a bench in close confabulation with De Tremblaye. He had seen Lord Wellington with her when he had passed that way before, and had not dared to salute her. But he'd be damned if he was going to be frightened away by that spy fellow. He left his companions and approached the lady, looking uncommonly handsome and saluting her with a touch of something like swagger, unusual in him. De Tremblaye's back was turned towards him and doña Ismena was so absorbed in their conversation that she also did not observe Harry. He was struck by her pallor under her rouge and by the anxious, frightened expression of the face he was accustomed to see so carelessly gay. He heard De Tremblaye say in an urgent, almost bullying tone:

'You can promise me then that milord will be at your house at eight o'clock this evening.'

Ismena, catching sight of Harry, made no reply, but smiled at him, rather a piteous little smile. De Tremblaye started upright from his stooping position and the two men's glances met like sword-blades. That was only for the fraction of a second; then De Tremblaye's face again wore its usual expression of somewhat sardonic politeness.

'I must now leave you, charming Condesa,' he said, hat in hand, 'since I have an engagement else-

THE SPANISH LADY

where. I wish I could flatter myself that you will miss me, but my place is already more agreeably filled.'

Of course doña Ismena implored him to remain; and of course she would have been dismayed if he had yielded to her entreaties. But there was no chance of his doing that. The information which she had given him was too important.

Poor Ismenita! Harry thought. How frightened and unhappy she looked! What had that fellow been saying to her? And why did he attach importance to Lord Wellington being at the Quinta at eight o'clock this evening? Like Mrs. Matthews, he suspected there was some 'hanky-panky' somewhere, but could not lay hold of anything definite. Anyhow it was a shame to drag her into it — Ismenita, who was just there to be beautiful and enchanting and not to have a care in the world. He made his ceremonious bow to her and said, 'I kiss your Excellency's feet,' with the usual twinkle in his blue eye which showed the English boy's sense of the absurdity of these foreign ways, even while he adopted them. She looked up at him and tried to give him her usual vivacious glance and smile; but he thought it was like flat champagne, with a very small breadcrumb dropped into it.

'Has that Frenchman been frightening you, Condesita?' he asked. 'I'll break every bone in his body for twopence — no, I mean a kiss — only I know that's too big a price to ask for anything short of running the fellow through. *Ay de mi Señora!* You have no idea how cruel it is to insist on a man con-

THE SPANISH LADY

tinually saying to you: "I kiss your hands" or "I kiss your feet" — and in fact never once allowing the poor wretch to do so.'

The sparkle began to return to Ismena's eyes.

'What never, Señorito?'

'Practically never, Señorita.'

And they both laughed quite merrily; for it was only a few days since Harry had so far forgotten himself as to kiss Ismena's hand at the ball. And once before, at the Quinta, he had, half in earnest, half in fun, kissed her charming little feet. But that was a long time ago, she thought. Probably he had kissed that bold little English Miss a dozen times since then — and not only on the feet or the hands.

Santa Maria purissima! Que vergüenza!

'Why is De Tremblaye troubling you about seeing El Lord?' asked Harry. 'He has only to go to Headquarters to see him. Lord Wellington likes that Frenchman much better than he likes me. Very probably you do also, Ismena. You seem confidential enough with him.'

She laughed delightedly.

'*Hombre!* You are jealous. I thought Englishmen were not jealous.'

'Of course I am jealous,' cried the young humbug, who would have denied with an oath being jealous of Lord Fitzroy Somerset. 'Every one is. At this moment there are I don't know how many men infernally jealous of me because I stand here talking to you, Condesita. But I'm not jealous of that devil

THE SPANISH LADY

De Tremblaye. I think he's annoying you, he's trying to make you do something for him which you don't want to do.'

So far Harry's guess was not very wide of the mark. Ismena was grateful to him for his sympathy. She was not used to receiving sympathy from men. Where she was concerned, they were generally too much absorbed in the gratification or frustration of their sinful lusts, or even merely their social vanity, to consider her feelings. Ismena longed to tell Harry all about this scheme of her relatives for getting hold of El Lord and making him drop his persecution of them; and how afraid she was that it would all be a failure, and how she could not understand why De Tremblaye should mix himself up in it. But of course she could not really tell anyone of her doubts and anxieties, least of all a British officer.

'De Tremblaye is like other people,' she replied, shrugging her shoulders. 'He imagines that I have influence with El Lord – that I can get him things he wants – do for him something he wants.'

'I believe De Tremblaye is anxious to paint Lord Wellington's portrait. Perhaps he thinks you can persuade his Excellency to sit for it. Caramba! I should be curious to see a portrait of El Lord looking amiable, as he surely must look when you are smiling on him, doña Ismena.'

'A portrait!' returned Ismena. 'Cá – / Of course that is what De Tremblaye wants. Or perhaps he wants to paint Velintòn's face as he painted mine for

THE SPANISH LADY

the ball, with beautiful French rouge. But I don't want to see El Lord's face when De Tremblaye is painting it. No, Señor!

Ismena was strangely unlike herself. What could De Tremblaye have said to upset her so?

'*Pobrecita!*' he murmured.

That terrified look vanished from the beautiful eyes and they looked at him with more than their usual magic.

'*Vaya, Arrigo!* Why think of tiresome people? Let us speak no more of them. Let us take a *paseito*. English people always wish to walk. In Hell, where you will all go to, you will have to sit still to eternity, and when we Spaniards are in Purgatory we shall be walking and walking all the time, until we reach Paradise.'

'I am afraid, Ismena, whoever walks with you will not want to reach Paradise.'

A little teasing smile answered the compliment. The smile of Ismena was more spell-binding than ever before. Harry forgot about De Tremblaye, it is to be feared that he forgot about Ellen. The eyes of Ismena called to him from without, the wine of Xerez spoke to him within, both bidding him drink to the utmost of the wine of life, since the cup might to-morrow be snatched from his lips.

CHAPTER XV

THE Commander-in-Chief stood by the table in the window reading a letter from the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool. Lord Fitzroy Somerset was opening freshly arrived London newspapers; spreading them, perhaps purposely, over the scored maps on the table. Two messengers, both unexpected, had arrived in Cadiz almost at the same moment. One was a confidential emissary from Marshal Beresford, sent to inform Lord Wellington of certain delicate matters concerning Spanish politics which the Marshal dared not commit to paper. The other was the bearer of the letter from the Prime Minister which Wellington was reading with so intense an interest.

'This is amazing news you have brought, Mr. Clinton,' he said, turning to the Prime Minister's messenger. 'By God it is. You are in luck, Captain Bell, to arrive just in time to hear it.'

'Have the Roossians got Boney, my lord?' asked the Captain eagerly.

'No,' replied Wellington, 'but they've got his army. Bonaparte has arrived in Paris practically alone. The catastrophe in Russia has been even greater than was reported.'

At this moment he caught sight of Marsland, who was standing at attention just inside the door of the room. After knocking several times and receiving no answer, he had slipped in. His lordship thundered at the Corporal:

THE SPANISH LADY

'How dare you enter this room without orders, you insolent scoundrell!'

'I beg your lordship's pardon, but you told me to send José to you. He's not to be found.'

'And why the devil is José not to be found?'

Marsland not knowing why, was silent, and prepared to retire.

The Chief held up his hand.

'Stop. If José neglects his duties, someone else must do them, I suppose.'

Making his excuses to his guests, he disappeared into a communicating room. There was a small writing-table there. He sat down before it and passed his hand over his forehead.

Was it so short a time before that he had promised — no, not quite promised Ismena, but absolutely promised himself — to meet her this evening in the garden-house of the Quinta? Poor Ismenita! He had now no time, no thought to spare for her. But he must let her know that her feasts would be spread in vain, that the guest would fail.

There were paper, pens, ink on the table, but no sealing-wax. Damn José! The fellow had probably taken it to seal his own love letters. No matter.

Ismena's lover was always careful to write nothing to her which, left about, as she left everything about — bless her! — could betray their secret of Polcinello. But as this missive could not even be sealed, he thought it necessary to be essentially discreet in what he wrote. The polite Spanish form for excusing one-

THE *SPANISH LADY

self from keeping an engagement escaped him. Accordingly he expressed himself in French. It was a formal note, such as he might have written to the merest acquaintance whose supper-party unforeseen circumstances prevented him from attending. That Ismena could misunderstand, misinterpret his discretion did not occur to him.

Having folded the sheet of paper with precision and addressed it, he returned to the sitting-room. Fitzroy Somerset was speaking to Marsland, who had accordingly stepped forward and stood near the table where the scored map and papers lay spread. The Chief ordered him away thunderously.

'Stand back, fellow!'

Marsland, his stolid countenance exhibiting no emotion, backed towards the door.

'Here! Take this,' continued the Chief, handing him the note to the Condesa. 'Don't ask me how you are to deliver it. You must find that out for yourself. Now be off!'

Marsland saluted and retired.

Perhaps Lord Wellington saw some surprise on the faces of the two strangers at the ferocity of his address to the unfortunate orderly. Perhaps his better self reproached his worse for it. He laughed a little awkwardly and said:

'I suppose you will agree with Fitz, who says I'm a brute to the men?'

'Good God, sir! I'm sure I never said anything of the kind,' exclaimed Lord Fitzroy.

THE SPANISH LADY

'You thought it anyhow, my boy! When I was your age – I hadn't your luck though, for I was only an ordinary subaltern – I found out that a Colonel is always a brute or a fool. And I decided that when I was a Colonel I'd be a brute. – I was. I am. But I'm going to lead the British Army to victory at last, please God –' A faint note of exultation sounded in his voice.

'Some people at home think, my lord,' suggested Clinton deprecatingly, 'that, as the only real army Bonaparte now has is here, he'll concentrate his forces in Spain.'

'Do they?' interrogated Wellington, with his closed face. 'Some of my own officers think Bonaparte such a fine fellow he can't make a mistake. I don't agree with 'em; but I don't think he's a madman, in spite of his Russian escapade. No, sir. He won't drop Germany to snatch at Spain.'

'You think he'll withdraw all his troops from this country?' asked Captain Bell eagerly.

'Yes – with our assistance,' returned Wellington dryly.

'You're right, my lord, of course you are!' exclaimed Clinton; his thin coating of ice, induced by the atmosphere of the War Office, suddenly thawing. 'You'll do it. We've got 'em, got 'em in a cocked hat!'

'It's idle talking of things before they're done,' replied Wellington, in a neutral tone. 'But it seems likely that this year we shall meet the French for the

THE SPANISH LADY

first time on equal terms. Now, Somerset, will you settle these gentlemen in their quarters before dinner? They seem both to have travelled at such high speed that they can have had little time for food or rest.'

Clinton and Captain Bell cheerfully admitted that this was so.

The Chief was alone. He stood stone-still before the table, covered with papers and maps. His eyes looked northward, far across the bay. They looked hundreds of miles northwards – over rivers, through mountain ranges – and he slowly, grimly smiled.

'Ay, Jonathan Wild the Great!' he muttered. 'You've come to the bottom of your bag of tricks, have you? I knew you would. Now for the Big Assize.'

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Mrs. Matthews turned homewards she did not pass unmolested through the crowd. She was still too young, too fine a woman and too well dressed, in the foreign style, to escape notice. But her haughty demeanour and the glacial stare of her pale blue eyes soon put to flight her adventurous admirers. She was taken for an eccentric member of the English aristocracy and did not disgrace the part. She sauntered on, not quite sure if she was keeping an eye on 'that Condesa' and Master Harry, or looking for Lady Jane and Miss Ashby. And then three things happened almost at the same time. She saw on one side of the Alameda Lady Jane seated on the corner of a bench, reading the *London Times* newspaper. On the same bench Miss Ashby sat talking to an English officer; not Lord Fitzroy, but someone who 'looked as if he came out of the same band-box,' as she said to herself. A little further on she saw the Condesa, accompanied by Harry and followed by her dueña, turn out of the stream of the promenade and betake themselves to the very bench where Harry and Ellen's little tiff had been so unfortunately interrupted. Ellen saw the pair going to that sheltered spot; and perhaps they both wished her to see them.

Walking on, Mrs. Matthews met Corporal Marsland. He looked hot and worried and was trying to

THE SPANISH LADY

walk faster than it was possible to walk in a crowd which moved at so slow a pace.

'Has her ladyship sent you to fetch me, Corporal?' she asked.

'I haven't seen her ladyship,' he replied, scanning the crowd ahead almost feverishly. 'His lordship give me a note to deliver and I'm blessed if I can find the lady.'

'What lady?' asked Mrs. Matthews. 'If it ain't for one of my two — well, it must be for the Condesa de Careno.'

Marsland started.

'How did you know that, ma'am? I'm sure I never told you.'

'I don't need to be a witch to guess so much. She's the only other lady in Cadiz for Lord Wellington.'

'Then perhaps, ma'am, since you do seem, craving your pardon, to be a bit of a witch, you can tell me where to find the Condesa.'

'Certainly I can. She is sitting over yonder on a bench behind those palm trees, with Mr. Beaumont.'

Marsland's worried expression relaxed into a grin. He said nothing however, but —

'Thank ye kindly. I'll give her his lordship's Billydoo. And then, Mrs. Matthews, as Joseph seems to 'ave deserted the Colours, I think it would be more satisfactory to 'er ladyship if I was to see you 'ome.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Mrs. Matthews looked dignified.

'It was at my own wish I remained behind, when Mr. Joseph's duties called him elsewhere. But I must admit I have once or twice regretted being without a gentleman — these Spanish people have such peculiar manners. So I will accept your offer with pleasure, Corporal.'

Mrs. Matthews was curious to know the contents of that note of his lordship's to the Condesa. She watched Marsland step aside from the stream of promenaders and approach the bench under the palm. Harry, who had been standing opposite the seated lady, disappeared as Marsland approached. The Corporal saluted and holding out Lord Wellington's note, said slowly in a loud voice:

'Por la Señora Condesa de Careno.'

Having handed over the note, he stood at attention. Ismena opened the folded missive hastily and stared at it in amazement. Was it possible that these formal lines were written by the man who half an hour before had hung over her, devouring her beauty with his eyes! Not indeed expressing his passion with eloquence, but with those few, almost gasped words which seeming to burst from his lips in spite of himself, had a peculiar eloquence of their own.

She remained silent, staring at the letter.

'*Responso, Señora?*' asked Marsland, still standing at attention and perfectly expressionless, although in fact extremely curious to know the contents of the brief note.

THE SPANISH LADY

'No!' ejaculated Ismena furiously. 'No!'

Tearing the note in two with trembling fingers, she was about to cast it contemptuously to the winds when a better idea occurred to her. She folded the fragments together and handed them to Marsland, speaking to him slowly.

'Return this letter to El Lord Velintòn. You understand? Give this to El Lord Velintòn, and say it is the answer of the Condesa de Careno.'

'*Comprendo, Señora.*'

She drew a piece of gold from her reticule and bestowed it with a flourish on the innocent bearer of the insult. Marsland took it stolidly with a salute and a '*Muchas gracias, Señora.*'

These actions had done something to allay the storm of Ismena's wrath; yet she was still profoundly agitated when doña Pilar, who had been watching the little scene, came up to her.'

'What is the matter, *hija mia?*'

'El Lord Velintòn — he promised to come to the Quinta this evening. He appeared more enamoured of me than ever, Pilar — by the Virgin of the Atocha I swear it.'

'I saw that myself, *amighita*, I saw him take the key of the garden.'

'And now he writes me a note to say he will not come. Yes, a note, precisely as though I were the dullest woman in Cadiz and he were excusing himself from attending my Tertulla. To me — to me, Pilar!' She ended almost in a scream.

THE SPANISH LADY

'*¡Geeñ! Que vergüenza! Hija, mial* You cannot love the man.'

'*Per Dios*, no! But my brother, my cousins intended to meet him this evening at the Quinta, to prevail upon him to give up his persecution of our family. And now he is not coming. They will be so angry with me — yet the Saints be my witness I have done my best.'

'I will bear witness that you did, Ismenita.'

'*De Tremblaye* will be very angry. He will sneer, he will insult me because I have not persuaded *El Lord* to come to my house. But *Velintòn* is not a man, he is a stone. I detest the *Rubios*, they are all stones.'

Harry's mischievous blue eyes peered through a clump of bamboos.

'*Doña Ismena*,' he ejaculated, 'recall I implore you those cruel words! Stones! We melt like butter in the hot sun of Andalusia. Our poor hearts positively dissolve in the fire of Andalusian eyes, the agony is terrible. See, I am trying to catch all that remains to me of my heart' — he clasped his hands on the left side of his chest — 'which is running away from me so fast.'

Ismena was easily distracted from unpleasant thoughts to pleasant ones. The sight of Harry suggested to her that after all there was a bright side to what had occurred. She need not worry any more about *Velintòn*. She had done her best. He was not coming that evening. So much the worse — or so

THE SPANISH LADY

much the better! She could not tell which it might turn out to be. At any rate, there was Harry. Tantalizing, attractive boy! There was no reason now why she should not carry him off under the nose of his *novia*, El Lord's goddaughter. That would be a revenge on the Velintón family, and a very agreeable one for her.

She sat down on the bench again and laughed. Harry had thought Ismena sad the loveliest thing he had ever seen: but Ismena laughing was simply irresistible. Her little teeth were so white, her perfect mouth so red, and as she laughed she swayed her charming head so gracefully. Then she held up her fan and laughed behind it and over it with such roguish eyes.

'Have the kindness to tell me what you were laughing at, Ismena? I should like to laugh too.'

'I am laughing at all the people who will be disappointed this evening, because Velintón will not come to supper at my house. But I am not disappointed. No, Señor! I am glad.'

'I remember. De Tremblaye was to have met El Lord at your house. Of course he will be annoyed at not meeting him.'

'I don't care, tiresome man! What has it got to do with him? Why does he come poking his nose into our affairs?'

Harry remembered that when the matter was mentioned before, De Tremblaye was supposed to be going to the Quinta with the design of painting Lord

THE SPANISH LADY

Wellington's portrait. Ismena seemed to have forgotten that.

'But aren't you disappointed too, that El Lord is not coming to supper with you?'

How enchanting was the smile, the side-long look she gave him from under her silken lashes!

'*Que crees, amighito?* I think I am just disappointed enough to want some one to console me.'

'Caramba! How I wish I could be the man!'

No sooner had Harry said this than he wished he had not. It had slipped out because he had acquired an infernal habit of making those pretty speeches which foreign ladies expected; and because Ismena was really more attractive than any woman ought to be allowed to be, if poor young men were expected to keep their heads. While she laughed at him, there was something more than laughter in her eyes, something beguiling, intoxicating. Ismena's eyes, for all their brightness, had no transparency in the irises, which were of a dark warm brown, so soft and rich they reminded him of velvet.

'But if you wish it, *amighito*, you are the man,' she breathed. 'Come to the Quinta at eight o'clock.'

Harry was silent for a few seconds, his eyes held by the warm light of hers. Then he broke the spell, saying lightly:

'How can a miserable Ensign console you or your friends for the absence of the Commander-in-Chief? On the contrary, your guests will be angry when they see me.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Then they will go away, *amighito*, they will go away.'

Reading irresolution in his ingenuous countenance, she laughed softly.

'I do not mind if they do. *Cá* - ! You are afraid to come to my house, I believe.'

'Afraid! What an idea! But I cannot go outside the walls after gun-fire without a Permit, and Permits are not easy to get now.'

'You can get one if you choose. You do not want to come, Señor. You are making excuses.'

'Ismena!'

'You will come?'

'If I can get a Permit.'

'Say "Yes," *Arrigo*, an English "Yes".'

And Harry said 'Yes.'

Here was a sweet triumph for Ismena. The Great Man had eluded, insultingly eluded her snare. But the lover she really wanted, the cold teasing boy who had hitherto so strangely resisted that spell which drew men to her like needles to a magnet, had yielded at last. He was hers. She knew it. In a few hours she would have completed the conquest of Harry Beaumont.

Meanwhile, though she would rather have abandoned herself to this delight, there were matters to which she must attend. She must find José and ascertain whether he had already taken her message to the conspirators. She hoped not. She must inform De Tremblaye that the Great Man had played

THE SPANISH LADY

her false. She must then keep a dinner-engagement at the house of a Member of the Cortes, a supporter of her family. Since she had failed them at the pivotal point in their plan for disarming the enemy, she must at least not neglect their defenders. Incidentally, she wanted to flaunt her infidelity in the face of the insolent lord; her conquest in the face of the bold little Miss for whom Harry Beaumont had so short a time before deserted her. When she rose from her seat and crossed the Alameda towards her carriage, Harry by her side, she was disappointed to note that the bench on which Lady Jane and Miss Ashby had been seated, was empty.

Harry hardly knew what he said, what Ismena said as they sauntered towards the carriage. He was enveloped in her atmosphere, ardent, electric, narcotic, too. They reached the lumbering vehicle, which was drawn by three handsome mules abreast. Doña Pilar climbed in first, assisted by the old coachman, then doña Ismena. Harry stood bare-headed, uttering the obligatory farewell phrases. Ismena called to him from the interior of the carriage.

'Come here, don Arrigo! I have something to say to you!'

He jumped up on the step and looked in at the window. There in the sombre leathern cavern of the carriage sat Ismena, glowing, sparkling like a precious jewel in a dark case.

'You cannot very easily kiss my feet, *amighito*,' she murmured with a roguish smile, all pearls and

THE SPANISH LADY

roses. 'But you may kiss my hand, if you can reach it and no one is looking.'

Harry did not need to be asked twice. He thrust his head and shoulders through the carriage window and caught the lovely hand, which she held out with the soft pink palm upwards. He pressed it to his lips. But the hand was not passive. It caressed his face, the bright wave of hair upon his forehead, it was like the hand of which a later poet has said, 'Your soft hand is a woman in itself.' And while it thus caressed him, the Oriental eyes of Ismena plunged their glowing gaze deep in his, the soft voice of Ismena cooed the melodious phrases of Spanish Love. He would have held it longer, but she drew it away, murmuring — 'Enough *querido*, enough — until this evening.' And the coach rattled away more quickly than might have been expected from its appearance.

Harry remained standing bare-headed in the road looking after it for some minutes after it was no longer visible. His eyes were still dazzled by the radiant vision it concealed, the soft warmth of a hand was still upon his face. At length he turned and walked back to his quarters like a man in a dream, unaware of the streets through which he was passing, the place to which he was going.

CHAPTER XVII

MARSLAND walked slowly along the side of the Alameda with the two halves of Lord Wellington's rejected note in his hand. To him came Mrs. Matthews who had watched the scene from a distance. He gave her his version of it, winding up with —

'If her ladyship thinks that I'm fool enough to do her errand, she's mistook. Why, his lordship would throw me out of window as soon as look at me.'

'He might order you to be shot, Corporal, but as to throwing you out of window, you're a bit too heavy. Have you ascertained the contents of the note which caused such a commotion?'

'No, I an't,' replied Marsland sheepishly; and added to excuse this omission, 'I an't no scholar.'

'Will you permit me to hexamine the fragments?' she inquired.

'I don't know that there's anything against that, ma'am, so long as you don't say nothing about it. I was just going to chuck 'em into the sea.'

'In French, I declare!' she exclaimed, putting together the two halves of Lord Wellington's hasty missive. 'Nothing in the world except a polite intimation that his lordship's engagements prevent him from supping with the Countess. Well! I'm glad to hear it, my lord. But nothing for her to ramp and rave about in that style — not unless she'd got some particular plan for his lordship up her sleeve.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Shouldn't be surprised if she 'ad,' replied Marsland. 'I don't 'old with foreign females myself – too much tongue and temper for me. I suppose this means as his lordship is off with his Spanish lady, and a good thing too.'

'I agree with your sentiments,' replied Mrs. Matthews. 'And I wish as all our British officers did. But this Condesa's got hold of young Mr. Beaumont too, and what with his being as you may say engaged to my little lady, which his lordship won't allow, and then –'

"Is queering his lordship's pitch with his fancy lady,' put in Marsland, grinning.

'Just so –'

'I wouldn't give a cuss for young Beaumont's chance of getting Mentions in Despatches and such like, though I 'ave 'eard officers say he did good work under General Picton, scouting on horseback up Rodrigo way. Dangerous work, some people would call it, ma'am, but they say the youngster seemed to enjoy hisself over it.'

'That's Master Harry all over. From a child never cared what he rode or how many tumbles he got. And I'm sure it will break my little lady's heart if he's to be carried off and his prospects ruined by a foreign baggage, that I'm confident he'd never have looked at if his lordship hadn't come interfering between him and the young lady that was his choice from the cradle.'

'And if I may make bold to say so, ma'am, as neat

THE SPANISH LADY

a little filly as anyone could wish and pleasant-spoken with every one, no matter who.'

'And because she's rich, Corporal, these grand folks must needs have her marry a rich man. Silly, I call it!'

'I'm o' your mind, ma'am. I say, give a poor man his chance – especially if he's a soldier o' the King and fighting for his country.'

And in this sentimental agreement they became excellent friends.

CHAPTER XVIII

ISMENA drove first to De Tremblaye's lodgings. He had gone out and his landlady did not know when he would be back. The Condesa then went on to Lord Wellington's quarters to seek José.

Mrs. Matthews also was on the look-out for José. Lord Wellington had excused himself from dining with his visitors. He had taken a glass of wine and a sandwich and was writing in his room. Mrs. Matthews, looking out from a *reja*, saw José come out of a side street mounted on a mule. She saw him dismount a little way from the door and went down to meet him, as it were accidentally.

'So you've come back, Mr. Joseph. I've got a bit of news for you,' she said in a low, mysterious voice. 'I thought you seemed to take rather a hint in his lordship's supper engagement at the Condesa de Careno's this evening.'

José looked at Mrs. Matthews a little startled, and said nothing.

'I dare say,' she continued, 'you have plans of your own for the disposal of your evening.'

'*Per Dios!* I have Señorita.'

'Then I must inform you that his lordship has abandoned the project.'

'You mean — what do you mean?'

'I mean he will not go to the Condesa's house this evening.'

THE SPANISH LADY

A flash of surprise and wrath crossed José's face and was gone; but swiftly as it passed it had not been unobserved. There was only a polite scepticism in his voice when he asked, 'How can you know that?' Mrs. Matthews smiled mysteriously.

'Never mind how I know it. You will find it is a fact.'

At this moment the Condesa de Careno's coach stopped at the gate. Leaning out of the window she beckoned to José and in a low voice gave him the same bad news.

'But *Madre de Dios*, Señora,' he moaned, his eyes starting out of his head. 'Do you know that El Lord may leave Cadiz at any moment? He has told me to begin packing his boots.'

The Condesa shrugged her shoulders.

'I cannot help that.'

Then an idea occurred to her.

'Who is your English friend, José. I saw you walking with her in the Alameda. *Una guapa*, Señor! My congratulations!'

Even in this moment of bitter disappointment José did not forget his dignity. He was not going to say that his conquest was a lady's-maid.

'She is the dueña of El Lord's goddaughter, Miss Ashby.'

Ismena had rather thought so; and it had occurred to her that a dueña was a lady very likely to spread tidings, bad or good.

'Listen, my good José,' she said. 'You must go

THE SPANISH LADY

back as soon as possible to the Quinta and let my brother and his friends know that El Lord has after all refused my invitation to supper. And José, be sure to let them know in good time, because I am expecting Señor Beaumont to supper instead of El Lord and I fear if any of them met him, their disappointment might cause them to be discourteous to my guest.'

José was too angry to perform except in the sketchiest manner, the customary ceremony of refusing the tip he meant to accept. He took it almost at once, bowed low, declared himself to be at her Excellency's service — and determined not to do her errand. He sincerely hoped the infuriated conspirators would spoil her evening with the lover to whom she was sacrificing so many noble *caballeros*, including himself. But if he was not going to obey the expressed wish of the Condesa, he unwittingly obeyed her unexpressed one.

'I will tell you why the Condesa has put off the visit of his lordship,' he said vindictively to Mrs. Matthews. 'It is as I told you. She is in love with the handsome Beaumont, and he is to sup with her in his lordship's place.'

Mrs. Matthews bit her lip and raised her eyebrows. It was hard to refrain from showing herself better informed than José as to what had really occurred between his lordship and the Condesa. It was harder still to restrain her indignation at the idea of Master Harry being in the toils of the

THE SPANISH LADY

Foreign Baggage. She disguised her feelings by laughing affectedly.

'Well, to be sure, she'll have a much pleasanter evening with a nice young gentleman like that than she'd have had with his lordship, if he tried never so.'

'Pleasant? I think not,' returned José. 'At least it will not be pleasant for her gentleman. She told me to return to her house —'

'So that's where he's been to,' thought Mrs. Matthews.

'To send away all the people who were expecting to welcome Velintòn — to send them away before the lovely Ensign arrives. She knows they will be so disappointed not to see his lordship —' Here José laughed unpleasantly. 'She thinks they may not be pleased to see her new lover. They may be rough with him. It would be a pity to be rough with that nice boy, but they will be very angry to see him and they may play him a trick.'

This was more than Mrs. Matthews could tolerate.

'Mr. Beaumont may be young, but he's not been a British officer these two years for nothing. I fancy if they try to play tricks with Mr. Beaumont, they'll be like the man who went to catch a crab and the crab caught him.'

'Crabs! It is perhaps Mr. Beaumont that crabs will catch. *Quien sabe?*'

Saying this, José's smile was so disagreeable that the words, which might otherwise have passed as a

THE SPANISH LADY

mere echo of her own, made a sinister impression on Mrs. Matthews.

'Then you aren't going back to the Quinta to give the Condesa's message?' she asked.

'You think I have time to do that? No, Señora! Milord must already have been roasting for me this half-hour. I kiss your hand, I make my adieux to you.'

Mrs. Matthews watched him disappear in the direction of Lord Wellington's apartment before she slowly climbed the stair to her own room. She felt more certain than ever about that hanky-panky going on at the Condesa's house. Whatever it was, Mr. Joseph was implicated in it. It was true that she disliked Lord Wellington, though less than she had pretended to José that she did. But she was a clever woman and aware that however personally unpleasant she might consider him, his life was of priceless value to his country. Like many a soldier who served under him, she was proud of him as a Briton, though as an individual she had no love of him.

José had intimated that his lordship was leaving Cadiz immediately; so there seemed no further cause for anxiety so far as he was concerned. It was now Master Harry who was in danger, morally and physically. He was certainly being led astray by this Spanish lady — a married woman, she understood — under the nose of his innocent fiancée. And then she felt extremely uneasy as to what might happen to him at that country house of the Condesa's. Yet she

THE SPANISH LADY

knew that it was of no use speaking to Lady Jane about it. Her ladyship would pooh-pooh the whole affair; besides, she was out for the evening, dining with those old friends of hers from India — officers in Cadiz without their wives. Such were her real comrades. She did not know what to say to women. She was not interested in any of the subjects on which they usually conversed, except dress, of which she admitted she was passionately fond. But somehow they never seemed to want her views upon that subject, while men would listen with deference to her opinion of a horse or even on some purely military question.

Ellen had excused herself on the plea of a headache. At the hour Harry usually dressed for Mess, she remained concealed behind a curtain close to her little green balcony, ready to come out if he should put his head out of the window. She was sure he was there; she could hear his voice speaking to his servant. She waited, thinking he would send the man away and then throw her just a word, even just a look to tell her that all was well between them. The thought that there had been something of a quarrel between them was like a little sharp point pricking her flesh. It had not hurt so very much at first but every hour was driving it deeper into her heart. At length she was sure he did not mean to look out at her balcony. The manservant was near the window holding up some garment and Harry must have gone out of the room and then turned back. He shouted out to the man —

THE SPANISH LADY

'Just tell those people downstairs not to lock the door this evening. I don't know what time I shall be back.'

So he would not look in after dinner on her and Cousin Jane, as he sometimes did. Where was he going? She looked cautiously out of the window and thought she noticed signs of gala in his toilet. Yet if there had been any festivity in the small world of Cadiz, she would certainly have heard of it.

Mrs. Matthews brought her her dinner on a tray and remained in the room while she ate it. They were both depressed.

'Do you happen to know where Mr. Harry's going this evening, Mattie?' Ellen asked when she had come to the end of her slight meal. 'I saw him looking very smart.'

Mrs. Matthews hesitated and pursed up her lips.

'I believe he's got a Permit to go somewhere outside the city, Miss,' she replied. 'His servant told me so.'

'Then he can't be going to English people, for none of them lodge outside. Do you think he's going to the Condesa de Careno's?'

Ellen said this with an admirable air of indifference.

Mrs. Matthews replied:

'It looks like it, Miss.'

There was a pause. Ellen was pretending to drink her coffee; but it was just as distasteful as the food had been. At length she said tentatively —

THE SPANISH LADY

'I suppose the Condesa de Careno must be very nice. She's such a friend of Lord Wellington's and of Mr. Harry's.'

Mattie almost laughed, but the habit of years stood her in good stead. She replied gravely:

'The high ladies in this country do not seem to enjoy what in England we should call a good reputation. The Condesa is undoubtedly a good-looking woman in her way, and you may take it, Miss, that men, whether they are gentlemen or common men, are all —'

'Thank you, Mattie,' Ellen interrupted frigidly. 'But I don't care to hear about men. It's of no consequence to me what they do. I'm sure if dear Papa had known what men were like in the present day he would never have wished me to marry — and I don't mean to. I've made up my mind about that.'

'Oh, Miss Ellen!' exclaimed Mattie, exasperated into familiarity, 'don't talk so silly. You may take my word for it that Mr. Harry's as good a lad as ever stepped. It's no use blaming him. If a handsome female throws herself straight at a young man's head, there's not one in a million can resist her. It's not that I'm worrying about. I've got it in my mind, though it's hard to tell why — still I do think that fine Condesa is a spy of Boney's and don't mean well by Lord Wellington, for all she's such friends with him, as you say. However, his lordship must look after himself. What troubles me is Mr. Harry going to that house of hers, right away in the country. He's

THE SPANISH LADY

not gone yet. He's at Mess. If I was you I'd get Lady Jane to have that Permit stopped. She's friends with Colonel Morton, ain't she?

'Lady Jane would do nothing of the kind,' returned Ellen coldly. 'Nor should I think of asking her.' And she folded up her table napkin with decision.

'Then I say no more, Miss,' returned Mrs. Matthews haughtily. 'And I can only hope and pray that Mr. Harry, I knowing him from the cradle and highly respecting all his family, will not this night fall into the trap of what the Bible calls "the strange woman."' Mrs. Matthews took up the tray and left the room with dignity.

The early winter evening was descending. With a trembling hand Ellen lighted two long thin tapers in long thin silver candlesticks. Their pointed bluish flames 'made darkness visible.' There was, however, a fire-place in the room and an English coal fire in it. Every now and then a coal fell in, a flame leapt up and shed a fitful glow on the tiled floor, on the faded gilt furniture and on the dark pictures of rather frightening Saints on the walls. She took up a book and tried to read; but in a few minutes she left off trying. She found herself helpless in the grasp of a passion the very existence of which she had ignored; the elemental passion of jealousy. Like a dead leaf on the wind, like a stick on a torrent, her mind and her heart whirled round and round in the same circle of torturing ideas and feelings. Meanwhile her rational

THE SPANISH LADY

self stood impotently by, watching this inner tumult. She hated the Condesa with a fierce hatred, she hated and adored Harry at the same time. When Mattie had suggested getting his Permit stopped, she had rejected the suggestion with the proper dignity of a young gentlewoman. But now she felt capable of acting upon it, only she knew quite well Cousin Jane would not dream of doing such a thing. It was degrading to suffer like this, to be the prey of such abominable feelings. She crouched down before the fire, laid her head on a chair and cried bitterly.

CHAPTER XIX

Now Lord Wellington was alone in his room. He sat staring between two wax candles out into the gathering night. The orange lights of El Puerto de Santa Maria were showing dimly across the water; white stars overhead were momentarily growing brighter. He did not see them. His mood was calm and confident. There was going to be no setback this time. Since Salamanca the noisy politicians at home who preferred fighting the Wellesleys to winning the war for their country, had been obliged by public opinion to lower their voices somewhat. The Government was sending him almost what he wanted in men and supplies, and there was to be no more nonsense about his depending on the co-operation of Spanish Generals. He was going to get a square deal; and he had no doubt as to the result.

He had gone down and taken a glass of wine with his guests, before receiving Captain Bell's private communication. Then Bell had gone to bed, pleading uncontrollable sleepiness. Clinton was in bed already. The Chief had letters to write but was conscious of an unwonted lassitude. Bell's fatigue appeared to have been infectious; or it was the fault of the heavy Spanish wine. It was of no use to sit there and fall asleep over his work; an accident which when it very occasionally happened to him he strongly resented. He went down to the

THE SPANISH LADY

for a breath of fresh air. Then it occurred to him to go to his Cousin Jane's apartment for a quarter of an hour, just to rest his brain, before returning to work. He retained a rooted affection for Jane, though what had induced Tom Ashby to leave that little girl of his in her charge, he couldn't guess. Yes, he could though. Tom had been a queer romantic fellow where women were concerned. He was said to have made a deuce of a fuss about being rejected by Jane's sister Susan. Nobody else could see why. Lady Susan had been a very ordinary woman. After that Tom had taken no notice of women for twenty years; then had made that silly marriage in India. Yes, he had been a romantic fellow. Probably he would have left his daughter in Susan's charge if she had still been alive. As it was, she had been left to Jane. Ellen was a dear little girl and her amusing prattle was just what he required at the moment. Next year when he had finished his job, he would have her to his house and Lady Wellington should find a suitable husband for her. He could not think about that now, but it would refresh him to chat with her and Jane for a few minutes. No talk about Bonaparte if he could help it.

He crossed the *patio* and found his way up the dark stone staircase to Lady Jane's sitting-room. At first he thought there was no one there; then he espied Ellen. On hearing the door open she had started into a sitting position on the hearth-rug and

THE SPANISH LADY

was mopping up her tears. He saw her but not her tears.

'All alone, Ellen? Where's your cousin? Gone out? I see. That's no reason why Marsland should leave you in the dark and the staircase too.'

He took up a hand-bell and rung it violently outside the door.

'But I like it, godpapa!' cried Ellen, springing to her feet. 'I like the dark.' Then, rather reluctantly – 'of course I'll have a lamp if you wish it.'

'Of course you must have a light. I came for a chat with Lady Jane, but I'd just as soon have a chat with you instead. What are you doing here all by yourself?'

Ellen hesitated. 'I was having a nap by the fire. These Spanish rooms are cold in the evening.'

'You must go to bed early, my dear. There's nothing so good for a young lady's complexion as early hours.'

Ellen made a suitable reply and for some minutes they continued to exchange trivial remarks; which was precisely what the Great Man wanted. But he noticed that Ellen was not so sprightly as usual.

Then Marsland came in with the lamp and thanks to Miss Ashby's presence, received a comparatively mild rebuke for not having brought it before. He placed it on a table quite close to Ellen. She could not turn her face away from it without also turning away from Cousin Arthur. She hoped he would not notice anything; but he did. He paused in the middle

THE SPANISH LADY

of something he was saying about hunting in Ireland, and exclaimed – ‘Why, you’ve been crying, Ellen! What’s the matter, my dear?’

‘Nothing really, godpapa. Only – only silliness.’

‘Let me look at you!’ He took her by the shoulder and turned her face to the light. ‘You’ve been crying a great deal – quite spoiling that pretty little face. Come, my dear! Tell me what has gone wrong. You have more sense than most young ladies and would not, I believe, cry for nothing.’

Ellen remained silent, for the horrid, horrid sobs began to rise in her throat again. Her godpapa looked at her, spoke to her so kindly; he reminded her of her father.

‘I – I can’t –’ she gasped at length.

‘Yes, yes, my dear! I’m sure you can. You are not like other young ladies, who might find it difficult to confide in a man. I know you confided in your father – you had indeed no one else to look after you. Just think you’re talking to him. No doubt I seem to you quite a middle-aged gentleman.’

‘Oh no, godpapa!’

The ‘No’ tried to be as emphatic as usual but there was a lack of conviction in it.

He smiled.

‘Of course you do. All the better. Are you crying because you miss your father?’

‘I do miss dear Papa very much – but it wasn’t that.’

‘Perhaps you don’t like being with your Cousin

THE SPANISH LADY

Jane. A good creature, but rather odd. I wonder at your father leaving you with her.'

'But, indeed, I'm very fond of Cousin Jane. I'd rather be with her than with anyone else.'

'Listen, my dear.' He took her little hand in one of his and patted it with his other hand. 'I'm a hard man, no doubt, but I've got some soft spots in my heart and Tom Ashby's orphan girl has a right to one of them. Your father was very kind to me when I was a youngster — and some other people were not. So tell me all about your trouble, even if it's a love-affair. You have no friends here to consult except your Cousin Jane and myself, and I believe that even in a love-affair, I should be a better adviser than Jane. She is so very romantic.'

Ellen was silent a minute; then she said in a low timid voice:

'It's about the young man I'm engaged to. I've been engaged to him for years, but I'm afraid you don't approve of him.'

'You must know as well as I do that you can't be engaged to anyone. The Lord Chancellor would not hear of it. But no matter — let us talk as though you were twenty-one and could do what you liked about it.'

'You see Harry and I have always meant to marry each other, and I believed he cared for me as much as I cared for him — and now he's behaving — so — well so —'

Here Ellen choked a little and put her hand to her

THE SPANISH LADY

throat. Cousin Arthur guessed the kind of word she had swallowed. The young man ~~was~~ treating her badly. Insolent puppy! He ~~was~~ sorry for Ellen, though of course she could not possibly be allowed to marry the youth.

'What's the fellow done?' he ~~asked~~; and a certain instinctive male partisanship made him add: 'I dare say it's not so bad as you think. Young ladies exaggerate things.'

Ellen twisted her moist handkerchief and looked at it while she spoke.

'I heard some gossip about him and a Spanish lady to-day. It made me very unhappy — I didn't know what to do. I couldn't think of anything to do except to ask Harry himself if what I had heard was true. That was why I got him to come and sit on that seat with me, when you found us and said it was so improper. Of course I couldn't possibly be considering what was proper just then, could I? I asked him and he didn't really answer me — he only told me I oughtn't to ask questions.'

'He was right there, my girl. It's a great mistake to ask 'em.'

'But what else could I do? And almost directly afterwards he brought this lady people say he's making love to, and sat down with her on that bench under the palms, where he must have known very well I could see him.'

'No doubt he was annoyed with you. Women ought never to ask a man questions of that sort.

THE SPANISH LADY

Remember that. But if the lad's done no worse than flirt with a lady on the Alameda —'

'But he is doing worse — he's going off to her country house this evening to have supper with her.'

'He can't do that, I gave orders ten days ago that no Permits were to be given to officers or men to go outside the walls after dark, except on patrol. There are too many bad characters about the country.'

'But Harry can get a Permit quite easily. He's allowed to go out every evening to look after some of the officers' chargers that are kept in a stable outside the gates. At any rate he's going out this evening.'

'How do you know?'

Ellen hesitated.

'My maid — she knows some of the men-servants.'

'Damn servants! You should never talk to them. Thank God all the Englishmen hate my Spanish man, so he gets no chance to blab about me. I'm afraid you're being foolish, my dear child, and perhaps I am foolish too, but I can't bear to see you cry. It's the easiest thing in the world to stop this young man's Permit, because he never ought to have had it. I'll send Lord Fitzroy to Morton at once, to tell him there are to be no exceptions whatever to my rule about Permits. He'll only think it's because we're marching out to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!' gasped Ellen.

'Yes, to-morrow or the next day, but don't mention it to anyone.'

He stepped to the writing-table and scribbled a

THE SPANISH LADY

short note which he delivered to Marsland with curt directions.

After the first burst of gratitude to her godfather, Ellen sat silent, amazed, a little frightened at the ease with which what had seemed to her the impossible, had been accomplished. She felt ashamed of the part she had played. Had she not acted treacherously towards Harry? And after all, what good would it do if he were really in love with the Condesa de Careno?

Her godfather came back and sat down at the other side of the table. If the young man was in fact carrying on an intrigue with some Spanish woman, he did not wish to be so hypocritical as to condemn Harry's behaviour. On the other hand, it was a good opportunity for putting an end to Ellen's absurd fancy for this insignificant Ensign.

'There! I've done it for you,' he said, and added, echoing her own thoughts, 'But if the lad means to run after this lady he'll do it all the same. I'm very sorry for you, my dear, but I hope this unpleasant experience will teach you a lesson. Though you are remarkably sensible for a young lady, you're sadly ignorant of the world. A young man does not think much of this romantic boy and girl stuff to which you attach so much importance. So pray put it out of your mind. I hope before the time comes for you to marry, you will find there are plenty of other men in the world who know better how to value you than this young Beaumont appears to do.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'But I'm afraid I'm going to be faithful,' replied Ellen in a small voice and with a shamefaced smile.

'Well, of course women are faithful – damned faithful!' And as he said it Ellen fancied she heard him groan faintly. She did not know he was thinking of Kitty Pakenham.

'But Papa said it was his misfortune to have a faithful heart, so I suppose I got it from him.'

'Ay – he was a peculiar man in some ways, your father. But, Ellen, I don't want to be hard on a young man's peccadilloes – yet upon my soul, when a youth like that has the extraordinary good luck to engage the affections of a young lady of your attractions, of your fortune and connections, I do consider it very ungrateful of him, ungentlemanly I may say, to make love to another woman under your very nose.'

The Faithful Heart leapt to the defence of the offender.

'But perhaps it wasn't all his fault, The Condesa's so very beautiful, so very much admired – I don't know why she couldn't leave a boy like Harry alone. But they say she didn't!'

At the word 'Condesa' Lord Wellington stiffened in his chair.

'What Condesa? I only know four Condesas in Cadiz at present. One is as ugly as Sin and two of the others are dowagers. Who is Beaumont's *inamorata*?'

Ellen was covered with confusion.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Oh, I'm so sorry! It slipped out. I never intended to have mentioned her at all.'

The reply came curt and hard.

'You've got to now. Who is she? Out with it!'

'I'm afraid she's a friend of yours, godpapa.'

He turned his head sharply towards her and his voice was imperative.

'What's her name?'

'It is the Condesa de Careno.'

There was a pause. Wellington got up and walked to the fire-place, turning his back on Ellen for a minute. Whatever change his countenance may have suffered in that minute, when he turned to her again it was only cold and severe.

'I don't believe a word of it. You shouldn't listen to servants' gossip.'

'It wasn't all servants,' Ellen protested feebly. 'It was other people as well.'

'You should pay no attention to any gossip. Nine-tenths of it's sure to be lies and the other tenth probably is too.'

'I'm sorry, godpapa.'

There was silence again. He stood straight up by the fire-place with a very stern look on his face. Ellen was frightened; perhaps more frightened than convinced. When he spoke it was less harshly than before, but still sternly.

'I will speak to the Condesa myself and beg her to take steps to put a stop to this gossip about her and young Beaumont. I'm positive there's nothing in it.'

THE SPANISH LADY

The lad may fancy himself smitten with her.' Very likely. She's a charming woman. He'll soon get over that. I hope that will satisfy you, Ellen — though I'd much rather you dismissed the young jackanapes altogether. At any rate I will see the Condesa de Careno and I know she will do whatever I wish.'

He moved, about to leave the room.

'Thank you, godpapa,' Ellen almost whispered, rising from her seat.

Lord Wellington's countenance relaxed into a faint smile.

'You needn't be so frightened, my dear. You look as though you thought I was going to hang you. It's not so bad as all that.'

He laid his firm well-kept hand on her fragile shoulder.

'Don't think I'm more than just a little angry with you. One can't expect young ladies to be always wise, especially when they are in love. But let this be a lesson to you, my dear, never again to listen to gossip.'

He had thought to return to work after a reposeful chat with the ladies of his family. So indeed he might have, had it not been for Ellen's unfortunate slip of the tongue. He had not of course liked to see her cry; but you could not take the love-affairs of such a very young lady so seriously as she did herself, and there was something pleasant in being the friend and protector of so fresh and charming a child. But those last few minutes had spoiled everything. He

THE SPANISH LADY

left Lady Jane's apartment feeling angry with the world. He had taken pains, as any gentleman would have done, to keep his affair with Ismena absolutely secret. Then the world, which must needs be saying something about a beautiful woman of her rank, had been so absurd as to couple her name with Beaumont's. He had never once heard her mention the youngster, had never seen him in her society. Then he suddenly recalled the night of the ball. He recollected that when Ismena was dancing the Shawl Dance, she had singled out the young officer and addressed to him her smiles, her gestures of coquetry. Her lover had taken this as part of the play-acting, the pantomime of the dance; he had barely noticed who the officer was, had been only just aware that the object of her playful attentions was Jane's *protégé*. No doubt the young man's head had been turned by the incident and this was the source of the gossip. Puppy! He would certainly speak to Ismena about it.

He tried to give his attention to his letters, but perhaps his brain was tired, for he could not get this foolish little matter out of his head. At length he yawned slightly, pushed his papers aside and looked at his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock.

'It doesn't seem as though I should do much more to-night,' he thought. 'Why not go to the Quinta after all? I can explain to Ismena that I'd not expected the arrival of those two officers and then did not know they would leave me free this evening.' He

THE SPANISH LADY

smiled to himself. 'But I believe Ismena will be too glad to see me to want my explanations.'

He summoned José.

'Go to the stable and ask for my black charger. If you meet anyone say it is for yourself and that you have my leave to take it. Meet me behind the Church, as before.'

José bowed in silence and withdrew.

The happiness, the holiday feeling which now invaded Wellington's mind, drove out every disagreeable impression. He felt a kindly wish to send little Ellen happy to bed. He wrote her a note saying that he was going at once to see the Condesa de Careao and felt sure he would be able to tell Ellen to-morrow that there was nothing at all in the tale she had heard. Wrapping himself in his cloak and pulling his hat over his eyes, he let himself out of his quarters by a back door opening into a dark street.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. MATTHEWS had been much relieved to learn that Mr. Harry was not getting his Permit that evening. But the missive which Ellen's godfather had sent to her to calm her mind did not have that effect. She felt uneasiness of another kind now. She recollected that Mattie, who was not a fanciful woman, had a strong impression that danger was lurking for Lord Wellington at the Condesa's house. She called Mattie in and told her what had happened. Mattie looked gravely concerned.

'Supposing something were to happen to his lordship? That would be a nice kettle of fish for everybody.'

'And all my fault, my senseless slip of the tongue. Oh, Mattie! Can't you tell Lord Fitzroy or somebody what you think?'

'They wouldn't listen to me, Miss. I've got nothing as I can hold out on the palm of my hand, so to speak, and say, "Look here!" It's all just Mr. Joseph's words, and more than that the man's looks — poisonous they are! But I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll go and wait about for him and see what he makes of his lordship going off like this.'

Mrs. Matthews kept an eye on the *patio* and presently saw José come in. She beckoned him to her and perceived from his face that he was in good spirits.

'I'm glad to find you looking more cheerful, Mr.

THE SPANISH LADY

Joseph,' she said. 'I'm sure I was grieved to see you so upset this afternoon. Has his lordship gone off to his Condesa after all?'

'It's not my business to tell you that, Señora,' replied José cautiously.

'But supposing I know and can tell you a bit more? Mr. Beaumont's Permit has been stopped.'

'That is very good luck,' replied José. '*Caracoles!* I was thinking if the two gentlemen had met at the Condesa's house there would have been trouble.'

'Then there's that trick she was going to play off on his lordship. Mr. Beaumont might have been in the way. Well, I do hope she hasn't given up the notion of taking his lordship down a bit. I want a little bit of revenge, I do, and I'm sure you feel the same, Mr. Joseph.'

Those fine black eyes Mrs. Matthews had admired so much, rolled upon her with sinister glitter.

'You really want revenge?' he almost whispered. '*Quien sabe!* you may have it — just a very little bit.'

He laughed low but rather hysterically, rubbing his hands on his thighs. Then he stopped laughing suddenly.

'Good-night, Señora. I hope you will sleep well,' he said: made her a very low bow, hat in hand, and disappeared in the direction of Lord Wellington's apartment.

Now José had not said a thing which, as Mrs. Matthews expressed it, she could hold out on her hand and show people. Yet if his words were inde-

THE SPANISH LADY

finite,' the impression he made upon her mind was definite. She returned and confided the same to Ellen. Close as both stood to the Great Man and little as Mrs. Matthews personally liked him, they were both more or less aware of his tremendous importance. He was not only the Saviour of Spain, but the pivot on which at that moment the European Event was swinging. Apart from Ellen's affection for him, the bare suspicion that he might be running into danger was terrible indeed. And only these two women, a young girl and her maid, seemed to have any suspicion of it. Ellen tried in vain to think of someone in whom she could confide. Lord Fitzroy Somerset was the only man in Cadiz she knew at all well and she was sure he would frown at her mention of the Condesa and smile politely at her fears, as the timid fancies of a young lady. She must sacrifice her pride.

'Please find Mr. Harry at once, Mattie,' she said. 'He is more likely to pay attention to what you say than anyone else is; and although he is such a silly boy'—here she smiled wanly—'he would know better than either of us what ought to be done.'

'I'll send Marsland for him,' replied Mrs. Matthews.

She returned almost immediately, having found Marsland spelling out a newspaper and smoking in the gallery of the *patio*. He, believing himself an emissary of True Love thwarted, flew on his mission.

'You must speak to Mr. Harry yourself if he

THE SPANISH LADY

comes, Mattie,' said Ellen. 'I don't wish to see him.'

'Oh, Miss! He's sure to ask for you!'

'I don't see why he should. Anyhow I don't want to see him.'

It was quite as much what she had done herself as what Harry had done which made Ellen shy of seeing him. She had been a sneak, she had 'peached' — an unforgivable offence — she had caused his Permit to be withdrawn. She had also caused the Commander-in-Chief to ride off that night to that house where there was reason to think he was in danger — exactly what kind of danger she could not guess.

CHAPTER XXI

HARRY had got his Permit to go to the stables as usual. He sat on at Mess though he took little part and no interest in the conversation. He ate little and blamed the dinner, although it was better than many which he had eaten with appetite. He took as little wine as he could when the bottle was passing quickly round, after the custom of the day. He did not want Ismena to confound him with the drunken red-faced boors who too often represented Englishmen in Spanish eyes. But he was already drunken, though not with wine. Like the intoxicating fumes of some strange drug, sweeter than incense, the recollected looks of Ismena, her eyes, her voice, her soft caressing touch were working in every fibre of his body. When he looked round the table at the other men sitting there, it seemed to him extraordinary that they should all be the same as usual: that no one should know he was changed and what had changed him. But of course they could not possibly guess that a woman reputed to be the most beautiful and fascinating lady of Spain, a woman princes had sought in vain, had chosen him — just young Beaumont — to be her lover. He pitied them because this wonderful thing had not happened to any of them. He pitied and despised his own self of yesterday, because not only had this thing not yet happened to him, but because he would have avoided it if he could. ~~He~~ had not known how glorious it

THE SPANISH LADY

would be to give himself up, to be absolutely in the power of this passion which was at once stimulating and anæsthetizing. Yet at the back of his mind there was a Something which made him not want to be alone until the moment came to go to Ismena. It occurred to him, however, that he would do well to take his pistols with him when he went, for although it was but a short way to the Quinta, there were gipsies and other suspicious characters about. So he walked back to his quarters in the early winter darkness, through the narrow ill-paved streets. And the Something which had hitherto been lurking in the depths of his consciousness forced its way to the surface. It became the phantoms of two people — Ellen Ashby and his grandfather — the man he had loved and revered through the whole of his short life. He seemed to see his grandfather's fine face regarding him sternly, reproachfully. Then there was little Nellie — of course he had been in love with her ever since he was a boy; and it is always worrying to a man to be in love with two women at once. But for the moment the wine of his new passion — perhaps not so new as he thought — was working strongly in his veins and he thrust those phantoms angrily away. He knew any man of the World would laugh at the idea of ordering his life according to the precepts of a parson and the notions of a girl. Ellen was a mere child. She could not possibly inspire such a feeling as this which drew him so irresistibly to Ismena. This was Love, this was the real thing.

THE SPANISH LADY

At the door of his quarters he found Colonel Morton's Orderly with a note for him. The man said he had been waiting for Harry for some time. The note contained the information that Ensign Beaumont's Permit was cancelled, according to instructions received from Headquarters, whereby no one was to be allowed outside the walls after gun-fire, on any pretext. Colonel Morton added that he believed he never ought to have let Harry have the Permit, but he had been reluctant to leave the stables, containing several valuable horses, in the sole charge of a Spanish groom for so many hours.

Thus suddenly a strong hand had been laid on the rein of Harry's passions, which had slipped from his own. He read the note standing under a lamp. The Orderly, knowing the contents of the note, marked the dismay written on Harry's countenance with a curious eye. The so private affair of Lord Wellington, the Condesa de Careno and the young Ensign was writ large, larger than life, for all the little world of Cadiz to read. The betting was on the Ensign. People forgot certain advantages possessed by the Commander-in-Chief.

Harry climbed the stone staircase to his room slowly, stunned for the moment by this sudden ringing down of the curtain upon his little Scene. When the door of his room had closed behind him, stupefaction gave way to a rush of wrath, of rebellion. Never before had it occurred to him to use his Permit to visit the stables for any other purpose than

THE SPANISH LADY

that for which it was granted. And just this evening, by extraordinary ill-luck, it had been withdrawn. Ismena would be waiting for him; and he could not even let her know that he was prevented from coming. Prevented — Passion and the fighting spirit whispered to him, 'Why be prevented?' The Spanish guard at the Land-gate would require of him no more than a wave of the customary paper. On the personal devotion of the Spanish groom at the stables he had already counted, to conceal his escape. Were it not for the British patrols he would be safe enough; and he who had slipped past many a French one, would surely be able to avoid those. Yet it was not wholly in vain that he had served for two years in Wellington's army; the strictest school of discipline in the world. Should he, an officer, disobey an order merely for his own personal gratification? Honour, the Spirit of Discipline, said 'No.' But the soft hand of Ismena drew him, the cooing voice of Ismena called him — 'Come! Come, light of my eyes! I await thee, consolation of my heart.'

He smote his hand upon the bare board of the table and said aloud:

'Damned luck! But by God I'll not be beat by it. I'll go.'

Quite suddenly a different voice spoke to him; a voice to which from childhood he had been taught to lend an ear, which the tumult of war and the rough licence of camps had never stilled for him. In his perambulations of the room he had come near the

THE SPANISH LADY

end 'where the lamp which so dimly lighted it burned. It was habitually burning before a tawdry little image of the Virgin, wrapped in a dirty muslin veil, dotted with paper stars. The trivial figure had said nothing to Harry. Glancing up, he was aware that to-day some hand had removed it and set in its place a crucifix; no smooth Italian plaster, but a Spanish crucifix, living in its terrible realism, living too in its majesty. The shadow of a vase filled with paper flowers obscured the emaciated blood-stained body, but the flame of the lamp shone pale in the darkness on the majestic suffering of the head. Shadow was in the deep hollows of the eyes; but it seemed to Harry that it was on him they were fixed. Before that face, so suddenly fronting him in the darkness, the young soldier bowed his head in shame; and in his simple faith he did not doubt that a higher Power than Luck had stayed his steps that evening.

CHAPTER XXII

A BOAT from the South American ship at anchor in the bay, lay to at the small quay of the Quinta. Inside the garden-house there was a party assembled: the Marquès de Montespínosa, Colonel don Diego de la Peña, and several other men of quality related to the family. De Tremblaye was there too, as always somewhat apart from the rest; roving with cat-like step at the back of the room while the others sat on stiff brocaded chairs, with the exception of don Diego. The Colonel seemed to have collected in his lean swarthy person all the leaked-away vitality of the La Peña family.

‘Is the Americano here?’ asked the Marquès of don Diego.

The Colonel pointed to the floor. ‘He is down there, Señor, with the others, for the present. El Lord is we know the soul of punctuality, but we do not expect him for another half-hour. You need not, however, lower your voice on account of these fellows below. The floor is solid.’

‘Then how shall we summon them when required?’ asked one of the Cousins, wrinkling his face until he looked like an anxious monkey.

‘We shall all come through that door,’ said Diego, pointing to one end of the room, ‘but the Americano will be posted in the garden.’

The walls of the room were painted in the Italian style, with the semblance of a formal garden,

THE SPANISH LADY

cypresses, balustrades, vases, statues. In the midst of these the door, indicated by don Diego, was cleverly dissimulated.

There was a pause. Under their mask of dignity, every one was looking pale and nervous, except De Tremblaye and don Diego.

'Where is Alonzo?' asked one of the Cousins.

'Yes, *Per Dios*, where is he?' thundered don Diego. 'It would not surprise me if at the last minute the coward —'

The Marquès held up an admonishing finger, artificially whitened and adorned with a large square emerald.

'I beg you, Diego — ! Our dear Alonzo is doubtless awaiting his charming sister, who has been dining in town.'

'I trust, Señores,' observed De Tremblaye, 'that the Conde has not told his sister too much. One cannot be sure what the Condesa might do if she suspected that El Lord might suffer the death penalty in her house — and I think we are agreed that he deserves it.'

'Personally I should prefer less severe measures,' returned the Marquès, taking snuff with a hand which trembled slightly. 'I will consent to it only if it appears absolutely necessary.'

'If we are not all agreed as to that, our preparations are useless,' said De Tremblaye. 'Let us go home, Señores' — and he reached for his hat and cane. Immediately several voices arose uttering various opinions.

THE SPANISH LADY

'No, no, Señor! you are right.'

'Of course if we could persuade him --'

The Marquès began again to temporize.

'Nonsense!' cried don Diego loud and hoarse.
'Death to Velintòn.'

'Let him die,' echoed the Cousins.

'Whatever you decide to do, *Hijos míos*,' said the Abbé, 'you cannot commit a crime. The man is not only a heretic himself, but the representative of the most pestilently heretical country in the world.'

'*Caracoles*, did we come to discuss the matter all over again?' demanded don Diego impatiently. 'I believed we had come here to carry out our decision.'

'There is someone approaching,' half whispered one of the Cousins.

A step was heard on the paved terrace outside the folding doors which led into the orange-grove. One of the doors opened slowly and don Alonzo entered. He came into the middle of the room, bowed to the Marquès and the Abbé and turned his large eyes mournfully from one to the other of the group without speaking.

'Speak, man, speak!' cried don Diego. 'Is anything the matter?'

'*Mille tonnerres!*' ejaculated De Tremblaye, 'can't you tell us what has happened?'

'Velintòn is not coming,' said don Alonzo, in a peevish voice. 'He is positively not coming. At the very last minute -- I knew it would be so! It's just like him.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Don Diego became a volcano of imprecations.

'We are betrayed! That woman has betrayed us!'

The chorus of the Cousins was lower, a little less angry but more frightened. De Tremblaye had regained his self-control. He came forward.

'We must see the Condesa de Careno immediately,' he said to don Alonzo.

'Fetch her! Let her come, that Ismena of the devil!' roared don Diego.

As immediately as though the devil had brought her, Ismena was there. She walked into the middle of the room with her Andalusian gait, swaying a little from the haunches, her head held high, the chin slightly raised. Slowly and defiantly she looked round on the circle of her relatives.

'*Madre de Dios!* You are making a great noise this evening, Señores my Cousins.' There was a sullen silence except from the quarter of Diego, who growled. The Marquès spoke.

'*Hija mia,* for God's sake tell us what has happened.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'Nothing has happened — precisely nothing. El Lord is not coming. That is all.'

'Nothing! She calls that nothing!' yelled Diego. 'Now by the bones of San Ildefonso she deserves the death from which —'

The Abbé clapped his hand over don Diego's mouth, whispering in his ear:

THE SPANISH LADY

'*Hombre!* You will bring us to the gallows?'

The Marquès also reproved the too impetuous Colonel and turned again to Ismena.

'*Hija mia*, do not be afraid. Tell us exactly what has happened.'

'*Cá - !* I am not in the least afraid of that noisy boor,' returned Ismena, pointing her fan at don Diego. 'Velintón sought me out in the Alameda to-day. He even went so far as to kiss my hand there, in public, with the utmost devotion.' There were sounds indicating disgust at the Englishman's gross behaviour; but Ismena continued unmoved. 'He afterwards renewed his vows of love with as much fervency as ever, and promised to come here at eight o'clock this evening.'

'You have informed me of that already, Madame,' broke in De Tremblaye, 'and I have been organizing our forces ever since. May I ask how you have let him slip through your fingers?'

'I am as ignorant as you are, Monsieur, of the reasons which have prevented him from coming,' she replied. 'All I know is that very soon after I had seen you, a *Rubio* brought me a note from El Lord saying that he was unable to come.'

'And you did nothing, Ismena?' asked the Marquès reproachfully.

'Nothing,' replied Ismena. And after two or three silent wavings of her fan, added: 'I merely tore the note in two and sent back the pieces to El Lord.'

There was this time a roar of uncontrollable rage

THE SPANISH LADY

from don Diego, and the whole circle joined in ejaculatory condemnation of Ismena's behaviour; except don Alonzo, who remained silent and inert, and the Marquès who raised his eyes to heaven and invoked a whole army of saints. Then:

'But what is the explanation of his conduct, *Hija mia*?' he asked.

'*Santa Maria purissima!* How should I know? It was something about this tiresome war no doubt. But no Spanish *caballero* would have treated a lady in such a manner under any circumstances. Was I to accept it from a *Rubio*? No, Señores!'

'Not though the fortunes and perhaps the lives of your family depended upon it, Madame?' asked De Tremblaye bitterly.

'You should have insisted upon seeing him, *Hija mia*,' said the Marquès. 'You should have employed all those amorous arts which a beautiful woman like yourself naturally knows. He could not have resisted you, enchanting Ismena, if you had sincerely tried to overcome his resistance.'

'*Gesù!* You do not know Velintòn. When he says he will not do a thing — he will not. That is all.'

De Tremblaye spoke again. 'So far, Madame is right. If Velintòn had business to transact all the hours of paradise would not tempt the man away from it. But was it so? Are you sure, Madame, that he suspects nothing?'

'*Quien sabe?* He certainly suspected nothing when last I saw him.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'And you have deprived yourself of the possibility of discovering whether he has learned anything since,' returned De Tremblaye. 'Why in God's name did you insult him by returning his letter in that way?'

'*Que crees*, Señor? Do I know how to behave or do I not? I can whistle El Lord back to me in a moment when I choose.'

'But, Madame – Condesa, do you know that at any moment Velintón may leave Cadiz? Leave it, you understand, for good and you – *Nom d'un nom!* That a plan upon which so infinitely much depends should be at the mercy of a foolish woman!'

'Perhaps not so foolish as treacherous,' growled don Diego. '*Vamos* Ismenita, are you sure there is no other *Rubio* whom you like better than Velintón? Some handsome young man perhaps, for whose sake you are betraying us, your own relations?'

'The idea has already crossed my mind,' said De Tremblaye.

'My love affairs are no concern of yours, Diego,' retorted Ismena. 'Still less of Monsieur de Tremblaye's. I have sacrificed myself as usual for the family advantage and done my best to bring Velintón here to-night. He has not come. Some accident has prevented him. To-morrow he will beg my forgiveness, he will implore me to receive him.'

'But he may leave to-morrow,' reiterated De Tremblaye, with a gesture of despairing impatience.

'He will not leave without seeing me, Señores.

THE SPANISH LADY

Of that you may be sure. You are all of you within easy reach, and if you will hold yourselves in readiness I will find means to summon you immediately if Velintòn should come.'

De Tremblaye was deadly pale with repressed anger and disappointment. The bitter contempt with which he regarded Ismena was more intolerable than Diego's noisy rage.

'If he should come, Madame!' he repeated with a shrug of the shoulders.

'I am unable to understand the interest which you, a foreigner, take in our family affairs, Monsieur,' returned the Condesa. 'Unless, indeed, someone has promised to pay you well for your counsels.'

Then turning to her brother, who had remained an all but mute spectator of the scene —

'*Hermanito mio*,' she said, 'I swear to you and all these gentlemen, I swear it by the Blessed Virgin of the Atocha, I will bring Velintòn here, and you shall all come and let him know what hidalgos of Spain think of his shop-keeping English ways. Now, my friends, I beg you to leave me. I am greatly fatigued. I regret that the poor resources of this house do not enable me to offer you supper, but doña Pilar has seen to it that a meal is prepared for you by an excellent neighbour of mine. As he was formerly Prior of the Dominican Convent at Badajoz which was robbed by the *Rubios*, he naturally hates them even more than he does the French. You will accompany these gentlemen, will you not, Alonzo?'

THE SPANISH LADY

She sunk down on a chair and closed her eyes, as though overcome with faintness. One by one the hidalgos took their ceremonious leave. De Tremblaye, waiting till the last, said to himself:

'Why is she in such a hurry to dismiss us? *Sacré nom!* I believe the slut has put off Wellington in order to entertain another lover, probably the handsome Ensign.'

His eyes crossed swords with Ismena's as he bowed and followed the others.

No sooner had she got rid of these gentlemen than she consulted the enamelled French watch hanging at her waist. It was close on eight o'clock. These Englishmen were so punctual, the slaves of the clock. She listened with anxiety to the steps and voices dying away up the orange-grove. And then she thought of no one and nothing but the young lover who must even now be hurrying to her arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHILE Harry was sitting alone in his room, with such feelings and reflections as were not any-one's concern but his own, a note was brought to him. It began: 'Honoured sir, – Mr. Henry –' but it breathed the same spirit as when Mattie's letters had begun 'Darling little master.' She asked him to come over the way and see Miss Ashby, who was in a difficulty and desired his help. It was almost too good to be true. Ellen wanted his help. But when he had mounted the stairs, he was met by Mrs. Matthews alone. She took him into the salon, explaining the absence of Lady Jane.

'But where is Miss Ellen?' he asked. 'I thought she wanted to see me.'

'To ask your help and advice, sir,' returned Mrs. Matthews. 'But as to seeing you, Mr. Harry – well, things have passed, sir, things have come to Miss Ellen's knowledge which have distressed her. She has a headache, poor young lady, and I don't think she feels well enough to see you just now, Master Harry.'

'You mean she doesn't want to see me, Mattie?'

'No, sir, she does not.'

So Nellie, little Nellie couldn't bear the sight of him. He turned and walked to the window, although there was nothing to be seen from there except the wall of the opposite house. Mattie went on speaking.

'Miss Ellen wished me to tell you, sir, what sort

THE SPANISH LADY

of fancies I've got into my head about Mr. Joseph — José as they call him, his lordship's own man, Mr. Harry. And as such very likely not observed by a young gentleman.'

'Yes, Mattie. Go on. I know José well enough.'

So Mattie began her story, which was no story. Before she had got very far she hesitated, expecting Harry to laugh and say — 'What an old goose you are, Mattie.' What he really said was:

'By Gad! Yes — I have suspected, that is, I have been warned that there was something fishy about that fellow José.'

Mrs. Matthews warmed to her tale and succeeded in conveying to Harry the impression that José had produced upon her; and while she was doing it, Harry found one more reason for being ashamed of himself.

'Alava told me to keep my eyes open for this suspected plot against the life of the Chief,' he reflected. 'And what have I done? Nothing, except fall shamefully in love with Ismenita. And here is clever old Mattie rooting out some very suspicious circumstances for me. Though I can't believe Ismena would plot to murder Lord Wellington or anybody else.'

Mrs. Matthews did not spare him the story of how the Condesa de Careno had called at the door and told José she was expecting Mr. Harry to supper in place of his lordship.

'And pardon me speaking so free, Mr. Harry, but if half's true what people say of her ladyship,

THE SPANISH LADY

she's not one as your dear grandpa would care for you to be so friendly with —'

'Never mind about the Condesa, Mattie,' returned Harry very stiffly. 'She is a friend of Lord Wellington's and my own. Go on about his lordship. He is not going to the Condesa's house this evening, so at any rate he is safe until next time.'

'But he has gone there, sir.'

'How's that? I thought he had sent a note to the Condesa to tell her he could not go.'

'Changed his mind no doubt, sir. Persons in love, no matter what their rank in life, behave stupid.'

In spite of his anxiety for Lord Wellington's safety Harry could not help smiling rather wryly to himself, as he pictured Ismena at that moment thanking all her little gods with rapid crossings of brow and breast and kissings of thumb for the non-arrival of Harry-of-her-heart with that key in his pocket. She would have naturally only laid supper for two. How awkward if a third guest had appeared! However there was now something more important for him to consider.

'It's of no use to go and talk to colonels, Mattie. If nobody would listen to General Alava they'd brush me aside like a fly. And the Peer too — he'd be most infernally annoyed unless he happened to want his life saved.'

'That's just what I'm afraid he may require, sir.' Harry thought.

'Unlucky my Permit was cancelled!'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Very unlucky, sir.'

'But it's not formally cancelled. I've got it on me. I daresay no one would find out if I went to the stables and just cantered over to the Quinta.'

'Do, sir!' — Then Mrs. Matthews reflected. 'But you'd get in a horrid scrape if you was found out, wouldn't you, sir?'

'Don't you be afraid, old girl. Yours truly won't be found out. The Spanish fellow at the stables is a yeoman good and will lie bravely for his master. The Spaniards at the gate are doing their sentry-go as usual, smoking and playing cards. They're busy and don't notice anything so long as you give the counter-sign. That's what the Peer counts on when he goes out alone like this, damn him! Well, that's the best I can think of, Mattie. And as there's no cleverer fellow than myself whom Miss Ashby can employ on this job, I'm afraid she'll have to trust me.'

'Miss Ashby will be very glad to hear you have the matter in hand, Mr. Harry. She is very much alarmed about his lordship.'

Harry lingered a moment. Should he ask Ellen to see him? No. Pride forbade.

'Good-bye, Mattie. I'll tell you and Miss Ashby what's happened to-morrow. Say good-bye to her for me.'

'Good-bye, Mr. Harry, and God bless you.'

Harry hurried back to his room, saw that his pistols were loaded, stuck them in his belt and wrapped himself in his cloak.

THE SPANISH LADY

All went as he had foreseen and he was soon cantering over the sandy waste ground just outside the walls of the city. It was always the case that whatever qualms he had suffered before starting on some particularly dangerous scouting expedition, they were sure to vanish the moment he felt his good bay hunter Highflyer between his knees. So now if he did not whistle as he went, it was only because the whistling habit would be detrimental to a scout.

Had his Permit been valid he would have taken the straight road along the Isthmus and turned off it only when he came to the track leading down to the Quinta. But he feared to meet patrols. So he went on threading his way through patches of vegetable gardens and scattered cottages, through scrub and stunted trees. The full moon had risen and flooded sea and land with light: too much light to please Harry. He hated to leave Highflyer behind, but it was necessary. He found a tolerably secure place in which to tie the horse up, under the drooping branches of an evergreen oak against which a thorn tree leaned. A long white wall ran from the main buildings of the Quinta to the bay. At the end of it stood the garden-house. One of its windows looked towards the city and he could see that it was lighted. He noticed that the white brig to which Alava had drawn his attention was standing nearer in than she had been. The wall was in shadow for the present, and in several places bushes grew against it. Harry

THE SPANISH LADY

made his way towards the wall, stealing from tree to tree, from bush to bush. Before he reached it he saw a horse tied up near the wooden gates leading into the garden. The horse occasionally stamped and jingled its bit. Nothing else stirred. Not far from the gates was a thick clump of bush and tall dead grass. Into this Harry crept and looked carefully at the horse. Then seeing no one about, he came out of covert and looked at it still more carefully. It was an English army horse, the accoutrements those of an officer's charger. It was not the one usually ridden by Lord Wellington; perhaps he thought that would have been too recognizable to be ridden under the circumstances. Harry, however, who remembered horses better than most men remember faces, recognized it as coming from Lord Wellington's stable. He tried one of the wooden gates and found to his surprise that it yielded to a push. He was just about to enter the garden when he heard steps as of several persons approaching from the side of the house. They were talking in low voices. They stopped at the gates and he hastily took cover behind a bush which grew on one side of them. He had no sooner done so when a man came out of the garden whom he judged by his costume to be a gipsy. The gipsy flung a large fringed cloth over the horse's saddle and hindquarters. He then exchanged its bridle for another and the stirrups for a pair of the large shoe-shaped ones commonly used by country people in Spain. While doing this he

THE SPANISH LADY

talked in his own language and whistled softly to the horse, which stood perfectly still, as though hypnotized by the gipsy's voice and crooning tune. He then thrust the English bridle and stirrups into a bag hanging on his arm, leaped on the horse's back and cantered away in the moonlight, alongside the wall.

During the few minutes it took to remove the horse Harry's hand was on his pistol. He would have stepped out and put it to the fellow's head had he not been aware that there were at least two other men, Spaniards judging by the few words he heard them say, just inside the open gate. The gipsy was armed with a long dagger stuck in his belt, and it was probable that his confederates also were armed. The theft of the horse with the evident connivance of persons at the Quinta, confirmed his impression that there was some mischief brewing. He decided to do nothing to cut short his exploration of the Quinta. Young as he was, he had given his proofs of courage sufficiently to permit himself some caution.

As the gipsy rode away the Spaniards in the gateway unconsciously raised their voices a little.

'You will watch here until the Americano comes. I believe he will not be many minutes now. You understand where you are to conceal yourself?'

'Yes, Señor.'

'Can you see El Lord sitting in there at the table?'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Yes, Señor.'

'I will bolt these gates so that nobody can come in from outside. Should El Lord attempt to leave by this way before the Americano and the other gentlemen arrive, step out and open the dark lantern. Wave it in the air two or three times. It can be seen from the windows of the house. Do not attack him. Invent some message to detain him until others can come to your assistance. But he expects the Condesa to return, so I think he will not stir.'

'Good, Señor.'

'*Vamos amigo!* Let us commend ourselves and our enterprise to the protection of Gesù, Maria and José.'

The gate was shut and bolted from within.

There was no longer any doubt in Harry's mind that Lord Wellington was in danger. And he no longer feared to intrude on the Condesa in the garden-house, since it was clear from what he had heard that she was not there.

He dared not move very quickly, since he knew by observation that in an uncertain light it is by its movements that a man or an animal is detected. The white wall too, in spite of the shadow on it, must show up his dark figure. So he retreated and worked his way down to a level with the garden-house, creeping through bushes and long grass. He felt in an inner pocket. The key which Ismena had given him was safe. It was a finely worked steel key, much

THE SPANISH LADY

smaller than the usual door-key of the time. He stepped quickly across the moonlit space which he was obliged to cross in order to reach the door, and making himself as flat as possible in the slight recess of the doorway, felt for the keyhole, found it and slipped the key in. It turned easily and he was able to push the door open quite noiselessly. In withdrawing the key he noticed what was to him a quite unknown and very ingenious arrangement of the lock, whereby it shot out again with a spring when the hand was removed from the key, so that the door could be locked by merely pushing it to. He left it carefully a little ajar, lest he should have occasion to leave the garden-house in a hurry. The moonlight falling through a small window to his right showed him a narrow stone staircase. His previous knowledge of the geography of the place made him aware that he was now standing in a boat-house below the salon where the Condesa sometimes received her visitors, which was on a level with the terrace of the garden. A pile of wine barrels made a wall in front of him, over which he could see, because there was a lantern burning dimly on the other side of them. He peered cautiously around. The boat-house was empty, one of the doors on to the small quay half open. He heard a sound of oars moving cautiously, then of a boat sliding along the side of the quay. Listening intently, he heard a man speaking in Spanish with an accent which he knew to be that of Americanos — South American Spaniards. He could make out but a few words and

THE SPANISH LADY

those of no importance. Then a figure passed the half-open door, walking with springy silent steps towards the garden.

Harry thought it was time Lord Wellington came away.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was past the hour at which Ismena was expecting Harry to arrive. What could be detaining him? Had he not promised to come? Her faith in the word of an Englishman was so complete that she was sure he would not fail her unless under compulsion. It was monstrous that gentlemen should be the slaves of rules as these English officers were: even the Commander-in-Chief in some mysterious kind of slavery to the Army. So far as he was concerned, only a sense of family duty had moved her to regret the shortness and infrequency of his visits. But Harry was another matter. After waiting for what appeared to her to be an age, she kindled the little red lamp, which had gone out, before a small shrine in the corner. Then falling on her knees, she addressed the most fervent prayers to all her favourite Saints to bring Harry safely to her arms. For quite a long while she was absorbed in these devotions; then she caught the sound of a masculine footstep on the paved terrace without. It was too quick and alert a step to be that of a member of her family. Could it be the answer of the Saints to her prayer? It was true she had given Harry a key to the private door, but he might have slipped in some other way. The wish fathering the thought, she approached the folding doors which led on to the terrace, already palpitating with joyous expectation. The door was opened

THE SPANISH LADY

quickly – the English way – to admit a British officer wrapped in a cloak. She started forward with a cry – ‘You have come!’

The hat removed, the cloak thrown back revealed Lord Wellington. The light went out of Ismena’s face. In a moment she had recovered herself, but the keen eyes of Wellington had noted the sudden shadow, the momentary chill. The suspicion of her fidelity which he had been firmly stifling ever since his talk with Ellen, sprung up and mastered him. She was aware of a stern question in the gaze which was turned upon her.

‘Milord!’ she exclaimed. ‘Arthur *mió!* This is indeed a surprise.’

‘That I believe, Condesita,’ he replied dryly.

She smiled at him, that smile which had captivated so many hearts – a little mocking, a little tender, altogether enchanting.

‘I was sure you could spare an hour to Love and me if you really wished to do so. This afternoon you did not – this evening you do – and behold you are here! Yet you seem displeased, *querido*, because I was not expecting you.’ Here her voice became amazingly sweet and plaintive.

‘Say, because you were expecting somebody else,’ he replied curtly.

There was a slight hesitation in her reply.

‘It is true. When I knew you were not coming I asked my brother to supper.’

He had the certainty that she was lying. Her

THE SPANISH LADY

brother! Who, even for a moment, could mistake a man for that mannikin!

'Pardon me, Ismena. You were expecting young Beaumont of the 98th.'

Wellington laid down his cloak and hat.

'I hate to hear you tell lies, Ismena – and it's of no use. I know women. They never deceive me.'

Ismena froze.

'And if I were expecting Beaumont?'

'If so, I can inform you that he is not coming,' he interpolated.

'I say, if I were expecting this young man, what right have you to be angry, Señor milord?'

'What right have I – ?' he began with anger in his tone; then checked himself and continued coldly, 'When a woman begins to talk about rights, her own or her lover's, it means –'

'That the hour of parting has struck. And it is you, milord, who have put on the clock. You have become every day more capricious, cold, neglectful.'

'Neglectful? Perhaps. I am not an idle hidalgo. I am a soldier. And unfortunately a politician also. I have been so much occupied that I have not even had leisure to dine for two days. What time can I have for Love?'

'Very true, Señor. When Love called you, you had no time to come – but when jealousy speaks, why then milord comes quickly.'

Wellington bent his head and was silent a moment. Then he said:

THE SPANISH LADY

'It is just.' He took a turn in the room in silence, then spoke in a low voice, his face turned away.

'It is a weakness – I acknowledge it. It is because I feel too much. My God, Ismenita, my God! How I have loved you! And that you should have been betraying me all the time – I'

Ismena was startled.

'Betraying you?' she repeated. 'How?'

'For the first handsome boy who courted you.'

This was not the accusation she had feared. Relieved, she laughed a little. He turned round, stung.

'You laugh? You think it ridiculous of me to have believed myself beloved, to have believed that so young and beautiful a woman could be true to me?'

'No, Arthur! I laughed at your fancying a mere boy could be *your* rival.'

'You deny it then – ?'

'Listen then, *amigo*! I am not a peasant woman or an actress. My blood is the proudest blood of Spain: and I have had to bear coldness and neglect from you and also the calumnies of your friends. They accuse me of keeping you in Cadiz too long. They say terrible things about me and you too – everything is my fault.'

Wellington looked surprised.

'They do, do they? Damn 'em!'

The Condessa was surprised too.

'You don't know that? Is it wonderful that, deeply wounded by your neglect, by these accusations, I should accept the homage of the first man who dared

THE SPANISH LADY

to offer it to a woman honoured by your love, the love of the hero of Spain.'

He was frowning angrily.

'Why can't they leave my love affairs alone? I don't meddle with theirs.'

He took another turn in the room: then approached her, took both her hands in his and kissed them passionately.

'You are an angel, Ismenita. You have made Cadiz a paradise for me, but you have not kept me here. You will not keep me now.'

'I know that too well, *amigo*. I only ask that for the short time which remains to us we may be more often together.'

'There is no more time, Ismena of my heart. I leave Cadiz to-morrow or the following day.'

'To-morrow!' she exclaimed in agitation. '*Virgen de los Dolores!*' – and sinking on a chair, covered her face with her hands.

He was surprised, touched at her emotion.

'Ah! Then you do care?' he cried, kneeled beside her and, taking her in his arms, kissed her drooping head.

'*Ave Maria purissima!*' she ejaculated. 'To-morrow!'

'In two days at least. So it must be, Ismena of my heart. Everything must come to an end.' At least hell may last for ever, but I know Paradise can't. Only my duty, my imperative duty, could force me to leave you, my dear love.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'Duty?' she repeated. 'Yes – your duty. But *dios mio!* What is my duty now?'

He smiled with lips that trembled a little, strangely agitated by her presence, her contact and by the necessity of breaking off, perhaps for ever, a *liaison* which had moved not only his passions but his heart, more deeply than any other had done since his early youth.

'Your duty, dear child,' he said, caressing her silken hair, 'is to smile on this our last hour of Love. Give me your beautiful smile to remember, Ismenita, not your tears.'

'But do not go to-morrow, Arthur, she murmured. 'Give me one more day. It cannot be of importance – one hour of the day.'

He shook his head.

'Not possible, my child. If I stay later than to-morrow it will be because I cannot transact all the necessary business in the time. In a year you won't remember one day more or less – but I hope you will remember me, will remember our happy hours. You'll forget my hurting you, offending you, Ismenita of my soul? We shall part friends?'

'Friends, Arthur? Not lovers?'

'I hope so. I love you – I cannot help it. You have given me feelings such as I've only read about in romances before. You have made me believe that a woman could love me for myself. Then, suddenly – that boy! Forgive my jealousy. It's not altogether on my own account. You will promise not to see him again?'

THE SPANISH LADY

'I will promise anything you like, *amigo*.'

'That's good!' — Almost like a sigh of relief he uttered it and rose to his feet.

'But why talk about that boy?' she asked, rising too.

'Because I promised my goddaughter, Miss Ashby, to do so. She is engaged to him.'

Ismena looked up quickly.

'Engaged? He told me he was not engaged to her.'

'Did he, the young knave? Well, now I come to think of it, he is not permitted to be formally engaged to her, but practically he is. The girl is very unhappy at his attentions to you.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'What does he matter? I promise you all you wish. But *Gesù, Gesù!* You must not go to-morrow, Arthur.'

'Yes, I must. That's settled. Don't speak of it again. I hope to God we shall contrive some way to meet somewhere, but at present it is useless to consider it.'

Ismena recognized that she was beaten. She remained with bowed head a pensive moment, then again stood to arms, her arms — the fan, the smile, the eloquent eyes.

'*Dios mío!* How foolish I am. How could a poor weak woman think to bend the will of a Hero?'

'To the devil with the Hero! I would rather you thought of me as just a man like anyone else.'

THE SPANISH LADY

She smiled her soft mocking smile.

'But I cannot forget the Hero when he forbids my Arthur to stay with his love one more day, even one more hour. This dreadful Hero has not even allowed her Arthur to eat his dinner for two days. *Caramba!* He must be famished.'

'Now you speak of it, I believe I am rather hungry, Ismenita,' he answered, basking in the light of her smile.

'You must stay here and sup with me,' she returned. 'Let me go up to the house. I will be my own *mayor-domo*, and fetch our supper myself, so that no one may interrupt us.' Stay there, *amigo*. I go, I return in a flash.'

While speaking she had wrapped herself in an ermine cloak. Quickly opening the door, she flitted out and away into the moonlit orange-grove before he had had time to remonstrate.

'Ismena!' he called after her, low and urgently. 'Ismenita!'

But she was gone and he could not, must not pursue. He stood in the doorway looking after her. At length, turning back into the room, he noticed a table not far from the door on which were two lighted candles and some writing material.

'Good!' he thought. 'I can write a letter or two here. That will save time when I get back.'

He wrote, concentrating his mind with an effort on various somewhat unimportant affairs. But Ismena did not return.

THE SPANISH LADY

'I will write to little Ellen,' he thought. 'I shall not have a minute to spare for her to-morrow morning.'

So he wrote a kind letter to Ellen, telling her that she need not worry any more about the Condesa de Careno and young Beaumont. He had put a stop to that nonsense for her. The folding doors leading from the terrace into the garden-house had glass in them, so that the writer at the lighted table was visible from without. The other windows were high up in the wall, as sometimes happens in the older Spanish houses, so that the interior of the room could not be seen from the garden, except at the end at which the doors were situated. Wellington, in what appeared to him the security of Ismena's garden, had paid no attention to these details. He was still writing his letter to Ellen, when he was aware of a slight sound at the far end of the room. He looked round. The light just there was dim and wavering, for some candles in the wall-sconces had already guttered away and others were in process of doing so. But there was light enough for him to see that a door in the wall which he had never before noticed, was slowly opening. For a moment he was startled; then he reflected, 'It is Ismena.' As he rose from his seat the door opened fully, disclosing the figure of a man wrapped in a cloak. Wellington instantly produced a pistol and, advancing before the man could make one step into the room, had the muzzle turned upon him. The intruder threw back his cloak and

THE SPANISH LADY

saluted. It was a British officer; it was young Beaumont of the 98th. There was a pause. The two men looked at each other, the youth overawed by the stern gaze of his Chief, Wellington amazed, shocked, trying to arrange his ideas. The idea which most clearly emerged was that young Beaumont had come in by a private door of which he had the key; for it was the turning of the key in the lock which had first attracted Wellington's attention.

'How come you here, Mr. Beaumont?' he demanded freezingly. 'My orders were that no officer was to leave the city after gun-fire.'

'I know it, my lord, but -'

'You know my orders and you have deliberately disobeyed them?'

'I came to look for your lordship.'

Wellington broke in. 'Don't lie to me, sir. The person you came to look for was the Condesa de Careno.'

'No, I swear to you it was not,' ejaculated Harry.

'Do you know why I came here this evening, Mr. Beaumont?' continued Wellington, thundering him down. 'My goddaughter Miss Ashby has been complaining to me of your behaviour. You have had the amazing good luck to win that charming young lady's affections, and you have persuaded her that her affection is returned. You then proceed to wound and insult her by paying conspicuous attention to another lady and one who I feel sure has given you no encouragement to do so. If the Condesa de

THE SPANISH LADY

Cafeno were acquainted with the circumstances she could not approve of such conduct, though I daresay she has been amused by your calf-love.'

'Say, do what you like to me afterwards, my lord,' returned Harry; 'but for God's sake leave this place. Even now you are being watched from the garden.'

Wellington controlled himself and spoke coldly.

'What do you mean, sir? Explain what you are talking about.'

'There's no time, my lord. General Alava told me before he went away that he feared there was a plot against your life – that a trap would be set for you here. Miss Ashby knows something about it too. She was very much alarmed on hearing you had come here this evening.'

Wellington made a movement of annoyance. How the devil and why the devil did people find out where he went on his private concerns?

'That's all, is it? If I were to pay attention to all the scares about spies and assassins, I shouldn't have any attention to spare for more important matters.'

'Your charger has been taken already,' Harry continued. 'A man, a gipsy I think, came out of the gate of this garden and rode off on it.'

'A gipsy has stolen my charger, has he? Damned annoying – but I'll have it brought back again.'

'He stole it with the connivance of two or three men, Spaniards who came from the house yonder. They have set a watch on you. Some South American scoundrel is out there in the orange-grove.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'How do you know?'

'I heard them say he was coming and afterwards I heard him arrive.'

'And what's your knowledge of Spanish?' asked Wellington. 'Like that of most of my officers, I suppose. Just enough to enable you to ask for a glass of good wine.'

'More than that, my lord.'

'Ah, I forgot! Enough to make love to the ladies in it.'

'For God's sake, my lord, don't stop here talking!' cried Harry desperately. 'I am convinced that your life is in danger. I beg you to go down that private stair. About a hundred yards away in the direction of the town you will see a dead tree and a few yards to the left of that a live oak and a thorn tree. You will find my horse tied up there. I implore you to go immediately, before they come.'

'May I ask who are the persons you allude to as "they"?''

'The Spaniards and the Frenchman, De Tremblaye.'

'The old story!'

'Your Spanish valet, José, is in it.'

'I don't believe it.'

'It was from him that Miss Ashby's maid found out things which alarmed her very much. She feels sure he knows of some plot.'

Wellington brushed the suggestion aside with a contemptuous smile.

THE SPANISH LADY

'This is the Condesa de Careno's house,' he said. 'Do you accuse *her* of plotting against my life?'

'Ismena? Oh no, I cannot believe that!'

'Ismena!' repeated Wellington. 'You're pretty impudent, young man. But you have at any rate the grace not to accuse a lady of murderous designs. Listen to me. The Condesa's father and brother and some other relatives of hers are in trouble with the Government. She has tried to get me to interfere on their behalf – quite impossible, of course. Probably these La Peñas suppose that if they can plead their cause with me personally they'll get me to quash the proceedings. That's the precious plot you and Alava and Miss Ashby's waiting maid have discovered between you.'

Wellington, who had been speaking with contemptuous calm, ~~now~~ stepped nearer to the young man and thundered again.

'And you, sir, who have the honour to wear the King's uniform, you have been spying upon a lady in her own house. That's a thing gentlemen don't do, I won't have any officer of mine do. Now be off, young man! Return to your quarters, the way you came, and for Miss Ashby's sake I will overlook the gross breach of discipline of which you have been guilty.'

Harry had never been so frightened in his life; but he stood firm.

'But, my lord,' he stammered, 'I cannot leave you here.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Wellington was amazed.

'You refuse to obey my orders? I give you one last chance, Ensign Beaumont. I command you to return to your quarters immediately. Go, and I shall treat your case leniently. Stay, and by God I'll have you court-martialled to-morrow. Go, sir!'

Harry hesitated. He turned half round towards the still open door by which he had come in. Then he turned again and faced Lord Wellington, deadly pale and speechless. He stood stock-still, his hand raised at the salute, his eyes fixed on some distant point, for he dared not meet the Chief's gaze. In a minute Wellington picked up his hat and cloak.

'Consider yourself under arrest, sir,' he said, and made for the door opening on the garden.

Harry sprung forward and threw himself between Wellington and the door.

'No, my lord,' he stammered. 'Not that way - I beg of you, not that way.'

'It's a matter of indifference to me by which door I leave,' returned Wellington icily, 'and as I appear to have your kind permission to use your private entrance, I will do so. Make my adieux to the Condesa and her guests and explain to her as best you can both my absence and your presence here.'

'The horse, my lord,' gasped Harry. 'Remember the dead tree.'

The back of the Commander-in-Chief disappeared through the doorway, Bang! He had slammed the door behind him. Through the louder noise, Harry's

THE SPANISH LADY

ear detected a slight tinkle as of metal falling on stone. He had left the key in the lock on the other side, in order to prevent the door from locking automatically. Either Lord Wellington had pulled the door behind him by means of the key, and then let it drop, or he had shaken it out by the violence of his bang.

CHAPTER XXV

ALTHOUGH Harry had heard the sound of the falling key, its significance did not at first reach his mind. The effort of will necessary to enable him, a young soldier, to disobey his Commander-in-Chief – and such a Chief as Lord Wellington – left him for a few minutes half-dazed. Then he tried the door by which he had come in and found that it would not open. He would be compelled either to leave by the garden entrance or to wait until the conspirators found him. Perhaps when they discovered that he was his insignificant self, not the Great Man at whom they aimed, they would not molest him. He could not instantly decide which course to take. Meantime he might as well keep the watcher in the orange-grove occupied. He wrapped himself in his cloak, clapped his hat on his head and sat down at the table, confident that the man out there would not be able to detect the difference between him and Lord Wellington. When he had sat down he saw one or two letters lying on the table, neatly folded and sealed. He also saw a half-finished letter lying there, beginning – ‘My dear little Ellen.’ Seeing these words the abyss of his misfortune suddenly opened before him. Ellen! Good God! It seemed incredible that only a few hours ago he had fancied himself in love with Ismena. That was a fire of straw, soon burnt out, or put out by the force of circumstances; but his love for Ellen was a part of himself. Now he would have

THE SPANISH LADY

to give her up. Lord Wellington would never pardon him. He would be broke. He would be a disgraced man for the rest of his life. There was nothing for him to do but to enlist in the ranks and get himself killed. The sight of a pistol — Wellington's — lying on the table tempted him. Why not put it to his head? He took it up and examined it, saw that it was loaded. But if he shot himself, these people at the Quinta would never tell. They would throw his body into the bay and every one would suppose he had deserted, like a private soldier in fear of punishment. Every one except his grandfather and Ellen. They would never believe that of him. Good God! It couldn't be true that he, Harry Beaumont, who'd always been such a lucky fellow, was in this terrible fix. It must be a particularly bad dream and he would wake up presently in the stuffy alcove of his room in Cadiz.

Immersed in these tragic reflections he did not hear the door by which he himself had come in, open. It was very softly opened and left on the latch. No one came in. Just then the agony of Harry's thoughts became more than he could bear. He felt it would be much easier to face a material enemy than these spiritual foes. He was well armed, for besides having his own pistols in a belt, he carried Lord Wellington's in his hand.

He stepped quickly out into the moonlight and stood on the terrace outside the door, looking carefully over the ground before him. If the man con-

THE SPANISH LADY

cealed in the orange-grove would only move, he would be able to detect the fellow's whereabouts. While he was thus intently scanning the garden in front of him, he did not hear a cat-like step stealing the length of the room he had just left. With the pistol in his hand he cautiously descended the steps which led from the terrace to a paved space below it, and so to the path which he must follow to gain the garden gate. Meantime the Americano had stealthily extinguished the candles on the writing-table and his lithe figure was hardly visible, crouching, swaying just within the doorway. He was frowning and biting his lip, for the feat he was about to perform was much more difficult than that of lassoing a steer from the back of a horse.

Harry stood on the pavement just below the steps of the terrace, once more searching the orange-grove with his eyes, before following the path to the garden gate. While he stood thus, unconscious of any danger behind him, the Americano with a tiger bound emerged from the doorway of the garden-house. The coiled rope sprang from his hand, whizzed through the air — and Harry lay on his back at the bottom of the steps. The Americano hitched the end of the rope round one of the short pillars at the top of the terrace steps and hauled at it. As he pulled he began calling not very loud, but urgently, to his confederates. Two emerged from the garden-house; others materialized from the shadows of the grove.

THE SPANISH LADY

Harry meantime was struggling in vain to rise and bawling curses at the top of his voice. Apart from the other disadvantages of his position, the tight cord which had caught him just above the elbows, hurt him very much. Now two men had hold of his legs, while another wrapped a cloth round his head to smother his cries, and incidentally half smothered him. He could just raise his fore-arm, so he let off his pistol, hoping to hit someone. This caused some excitement, but apparently the bullet had missed every one. There was inevitably some talking, but all was carried on as quietly as possible. For a moment the rope round his arms and shoulders seemed to slacken slightly, but before he could do more than tighten his muscles preparatory to further loosening it, he was securely trussed up with another length of it. All this took little time to accomplish. While it went on he kept trying to explain to his assailants that he was not the man they sought, but the cloth over his head muffled his voice and they paid no attention to his protests.

Thus trussed up and wrapped in his own cloak, he was carried back into the garden-house. He had ceased to cry out or struggle, reserving himself for the favourable moment which he still desperately hoped might come. He was laid upon the floor and there followed a low-voiced altercation which he was unable to hear. But someone arrived in the midst of it and the arrival caused a certain effervescence in a group standing near the entrance.

THE SPANISH LADY

The new arrival was cooler, more decided in his speech than the others. Moreover he spoke Spanish with a decided foreign accent, so that Harry could follow his speech more easily than the quick excited guttural utterances of the Spaniards.

'It is folly to delay,' said the new arrival. 'So far all has gone splendidly, but we must continue to act with decision. I beg you, Señores, to do immediately what will have to be done later. Take him out in your boat and drop him in the deepest part of the bay. It is the only safe course.'

The hum which followed appeared to signify general assent. Harry's blood ran cold. But a statelier voice broke in remonstrating. The remonstrance was replied to with respect, except by two voices; that of the new arrival and a hoarse bass which seemed to be that of the leader in the attack. The plea of the remonstrator appeared to be that persuasion and threats should be tried before further violence should be resorted to.

Footsteps approached Harry, where he lay helpless. The owner of the stately voice cleared his throat and spoke again.

'We beg your Excellency's pardon for the uncere-
monious manner in which you have been treated. It
has been necessary in order to secure a hearing from
your Excellency. You shall now be placed in a more
convenient posture.'

Harry was lifted up and seated in a chair. The critical moment had come. How would the con-

THE SPANISH LADY

spirators react to the discovery that it was not Lord Wellington whom they had secured?

Some one untied and plucked away the cloth that concealed Harry's head. He remained silent, anxiously surveying the seven or eight persons who surrounded him. They too were silent for a moment, in stupefaction. A tumult succeeded; cries and oaths. Through these sounded one harsh laugh. It was De Tremblaye's.

'*Sacré bleu!*' he exclaimed, 'it is the little Beaumont.'

He stepped up to Harry and seizing him by the shoulders, spoke in English.

'What the devil are you doing here, you damned young fool?'

Harry's blood rose and he forgot his position.

'Something better than you're doing, anyhow, you damned rogue,' he retorted.

'But *Sangre de Dios!*' almost screamed the dignified Marquès de Montespinoza, 'who is this young gentleman? Why is he here?'

De Tremblaye replied.

'This is the handsome lover for whose sake the Condesa your niece has dismissed Velintón - has betrayed, sacrificed you all.'

There was a hum of anger in the room.

'And now what are we going to do?' wailed don Alonzo, looking very small and pale. 'Holy Virgin! What are we going to do?'

'We are going to make sure that this pretty fellow

THE SPANISH LADY.

does not betray us,' replied don Diego in his hoarse bass.

He snatched up Wellington's silver-mounted pistol which had fallen from Harry's hand on to the floor. The Marquès checked him.

'Softly, *amigo*! Remember that the *Rubios* are patrolling the Isthmus in great force to-night. One pistol shot has already gone off in the garden. Should they happen to hear another they might have the insolence to intrude upon us.'

They collected in a knot and all talked at once. The general voice, led by don Diego and De Tremblaye, was against allowing the intrusive Englishman to escape.

'I warn you that Lord Wellington knows I am here,' said Harry. 'If I disappear he will certainly cause inquiries to be made.'

This he said bluffing, for he knew only too well what Wellington would think if he did not return.

There was a momentary check to the proceedings. De Tremblaye grew impatient.

'If Velintòn really knows that this young man is here,' he said, 'it is impossible to believe that he will greatly regret it if the fellow does disappear. His Excellency is always polite to the ladies, and out of consideration for the Condesa, I dare say he will not ask too many questions. I am sure that the safer course is to get rid of this youth quietly; he knows too much.'

'I regard it as a painful necessity,' said the Abbé.

THE SPANISH LADY

'He should be deposited in the bay and there is no need to do anything else.'

'No, Señores!' cried Harry desperately. 'Let me at any rate die like a soldier, not like a blind kitten.'

'*Gesù! Gesù!*' moaned the Marquès. 'What a sad mistake! And when we have killed this unfortunate youth, we shall be no nearer attaining our object.'

'*Vamos*, dear Marquès!' exclaimed the Abbé soothingly. 'Do not distress yourself too much. Remember that after all the fellow is not a Christian and it is of no real consequence what becomes of him.'

'You may say what you like, Señores. I shall accede to the request of this gentleman and let him die by the hand of a soldier,' said don Diego. 'That is due to him and to me. We are both soldiers. I see some old daggers hanging on the wall there, and since you object, foolishly as I think, to my using the pistol, I dare say I shall find one sharp enough to do his business.'

Now don Alonzo was not a man of blood. He might reluctantly admit the necessity for removing El Lord, if the man would not listen to reason. But why kill this unfortunate young man? It was not his fault if he was Ismena's lover and Ismena would be terribly distressed if he were murdered in her house. So Alonzo had slipped out of the room and actually run up the garden to find his sister. The others watching don Diego select a dagger less blunt than the rest did not observe don Alonzo's absence.

THE SPANISH LADY.

The thoughts which had passed through Harry's mind when he sat alone at the writing-table, were all there, ready to assail him again. But he resisted them. He concentrated his mind on facing death with the courage which became a British officer. Don Diego was finding a little difficulty in detaching the sharpest of the daggers from the wall, when a female shriek rang through the room and Ismena rushed across it to throw herself in front of Harry.

'Monster!' she screamed at don Diego. 'Kill me if you like, but touch the Englishman you shall not dare.'

Then clinging to Harry's helpless form she cried, *Amigo mio!* 'Treasure of my heart! Why are you here! I was told you were not coming.'

She turned fiercely on don Diego who had seized her by the arm.

'You dare to touch me? And you call yourself a Spanish gentleman? Clown! Devil! Assassin! Prince of devils!'

'Where is Velintòn? Woman! You told us he was here,' shouted don Diego.

'He was here,' replied Ismena, still keeping tight hold of Harry. 'I left him here. I know no more than you do what has become of him.'

'It is plain what has happened,' said De Tremblay. 'The Señora Condesa has made a mistake and invited her two friends to the same repast. When El Lord discovered there was another guest this evening he was doubtless annoyed and went back to Cadiz.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'I have told you, Señores, that I did not expect Velintón to come this evening,' returned Ismena. 'And if I had known that you intended to murder him – I suppose you did, as you are so eager to murder this unoffending Englishman – I say if I had known you meant to kill El Lord in my house, I would have sent you all to the devil before I served your purpose.'

'Ismenita! *Nina mia!*' ejaculated the Marquès in a pained voice. 'You appear to have totally forgotten your duty to your family.'

'You would have sent us all to the devil?' repeated the Abbé dryly. 'That, *hija mia*, is precisely what you have done.'

'And all for the sake of this wretched *Rubio*,' roared don Diego. 'By the bones of Sant' Jago, Ismena, you shall now be obliged to stand by and see your fine lover killed. For if we let you go before it is done, I am certain you would call in the red soldiers to arrest us all.'

'She is capable of it, the silly woman,' agreed the Abbé.

'Come with me, *querida*,' said the Marquès. 'Come to the sofa yonder. I will cover your head with cushions, so that you shall hear nothing, see nothing.'

'He is right. Leave me, Ismenita. I thank you a thousand times, but you cannot save my life,' murmured Harry. '*Adios, my dear, adios.*'

He stooped his head as well as he could and kissed the arm which was about his neck.

THE SPANISH LADY†

But Ismena heeded neither him nor the Marqués. Claspings both arms round Harry she clung close to him, shielding his body with her own and uttering the most piercing shrieks, mingled with invocations to the Virgin and saints.

'*Nom d'un nom!*' muttered De Tremblaye, 'the slut will ruin us yet.'

Don Diego endeavoured in vain to drag her away from Harry, with such strength, such tenacity had despair endued her slender body. He let her go and seized once more the pistol, Lord Wellington's pistol, which Harry had dropped on the floor near him. All eyes were turned upon the group; the helpless pinioned Englishman with Ismena clinging to him, intent on dashing aside the pistol in don Diego's hand, while he endeavoured to master both her arms with one of his own. At length, for a moment, he succeeded; the muzzle was at Harry's temple, the trigger pulled. Ismena gave an ear-piercing scream; but there was no explosion. Harry was the only person who had realized that the pistol had already been fired and was harmless. There was a pause and at that moment the Americano rushed gesticulating into the room, followed by another man. He addressed the company in rapid excited tones, and whatever he had to say held their attention. Harry could not understand a word of it. Either the man's accent was in fault or the nervous tension of the situation had temporarily eclipsed his knowledge of Spanish. The elderly Marqués hobbled away

THE SPANISH LADY

through the private door, which had been left open. A younger man passed unceremoniously in front of him and plunged down the secret staircase. The Abbé and De Tremblaye consulted together; then the Abbé persuading Ismena to loose her hold of Harry, talked to her rapidly and low. When the Abbé had finished what he had to say, she turned to Harry and said:

‘If you do as I ask you, your life may yet be saved.’

Don Diego had been watching these manoeuvres with dissatisfaction.

‘You are all cowards,’ he cried. ‘I mean to finish my work.’

Dropping the useless pistol, he snatched the dagger and made for Harry; but his arm was caught by his friend.

‘Fool!’ murmured the Abbé. ‘Will you leave blood on the floor?’

The dilemma in which the La Pefias found themselves was that the whole party must needs leave the Quinta immediately, dangerously crowded into one boat. It would be difficult, if not impossible to carry off Harry, dead or alive, and the water near the quay of the Quinta was too shallow to effectually conceal a body. Perhaps, too, the weaker spirits among them had no real desire to shed the young man’s blood. Accordingly Ismena was instructed to bargain with him.

‘Don Arrigo,’ she said, ‘these gentlemen have consented to spare your life under certain conditions.

THE SPANISH LADY

One is that you will promise, on the word of an Englishman, not to reveal to anyone what has happened here this evening, or to bring any accusation against the gentlemen present.'

'I will promise you that, Doña Ismena,' he replied; and his own voice sounded to him strange and far away.

'Another thing you must promise, Señor. There are people — enemies in the garden. Will you go to meet them and detain them as long as you can. You may show them this room, but should they desire to search the boat-house below, prevent them from doing so, if possible; if not, delay them as long as you can.'

'As to that,' replied Harry, 'I can only promise to do my best — but that I will do.'

'We know that the word of an Englishman is more to be trusted than the oath of another,' replied Ismena, and turned to her kinsfolk — 'Are you content, Señores?'

'We are glad to be able to content you, Ismena,' returned the Abbé, who was evidently frightened. 'We are sensible that it would be painful for a lady to see her friend executed in her own house. Therefore subject to these conditions, we spare his life.'

Don Diego had already flung himself down the stairs. The others hastened after him. The Americano, with a deft turn of the wrist, freed Harry from his bonds.

'At any rate,' he remarked, 'a good lasso will not

THE 'SPANISH LADY

be wasted at the bottom of the sea' — and vanished in his turn.

For a moment Harry was alone with Ismena.

'*Amigo do me cuore,*' she breathed. 'I beg you to believe that I have never consented to the death of you or of anyone else.'

'You are incapable of it, Ismena,' he replied.

'I thank you, *amighito.*'

The private door closed behind her with a snap.

Harry rose and stretched his arms, which were stiff and bruised. For some moments he was clearly conscious of nothing except that he had escaped death. Then he remembered about the 'enemies' in the garden. Who were they? Probably Spaniards pursuing some private vendetta. They must be in some force or the La Pefias would not have bolted. Anyhow he had promised to keep them in check as long as he could. He felt for his pistols. They were there. His cloak had concealed them from his assailants.

It was now dark. Long strips of cloud had come up from the sea, and one lay across the moon. He stepped out on to the terrace and listened; felt rather than heard slight movements in the orange-grove. He began very cautiously to descend the steps. When he was half-way down a light flashed upon him, the light of a dark lantern. It dazzled him, but he had his pistol out in a trice.

'Hech, sir!' ejaculated a low voice out of the darkness. 'I hope ye'll na put an English bullet into

THE SPANISH LADY

my person, for I hae aneugh French anes there already.'

Silhouettes, dim shapes, with noddin' plumes and flicking skirts, emerged silently from the black shadows of the orange-grove on to the pavement below the terrace. The moon glinted through a cloud, and there stood the Highlanders leaning on their muskets. 'Enemies,' Ismena had called them. They were not Harry's enemies.

He threw back his head and laughed, not loud but long.

'I'm afraid, sir,' said the Sergeant severely, 'ye'll find this no laughing matter. I am constrained to tell ye, Mr. Beaumont, sir, that when ye get back ye may find yourself put under arrest.'

The sudden sense of exhilaration left Harry.

'I expected something of the kind, Sergeant,' he replied soberly.

'I have orders from Lord Wellington himself to surrch these premises. His lordship has reason to believe there are gipsies and other suspecious characters lurking about, and he gave me instructions to arrest all such persons and any British soldier I might chance to find marauding here, and to give orders from him to any British officer I might meet not on patrol, to return to Cadiz immediately.'

Harry had every reason to desire that the Sergeant might discover the suspicious persons hidden in the boat-house; but he had given his word to protect them as long as possible, and he could not desire poor

THE SPANISH LADY

Ismēna to be discovered with them. He would follow the line given him by Lord Wellington.

'It's true enough there are gipsies about,' he replied. 'My horse has just been stolen by one who came out of this garden, but the scoundrel has got far enough away with it by this time.'

'Nevertheless I should not be doing my duty did I omeet to surrch this building,' replied the Sergeant. He coughed and added — 'Ye can go firrst, if ye like, sir.'

For as soon as Sergeant Mackenzie had recognized Ensign Beaumont, he had made up his mind that it was not gipsies that the Commander-in-Chief had sent him to round up. It had of course never crossed Wellington's mind that a mere sergeant could venture to know anything about his private affairs.

'Puir daft laddie!' thought Mackenzie, as he followed Harry up the steps of the terrace. 'To be led away by a daughter of Babylon to the destruction of all his prospects in life. He, who might marry a bonnie lass with plenty of tocher!'

The Sergeant wanted, so far as was consistent with his duty, to save the unfortunate young man from the consequences of his folly. Lantern in hand, he looked carefully round the room, fearing every moment to come upon the lady in the case. But except under the sofa, there was no covert in the room. He found Harry's hat on the floor and returned it to him. He also found a silver-mounted pistol, which the light of his lantern showed him to be engraved with the name

THE SPANISH LADY

and crest of Arthur Wellesley. Finding the pistol to be unloaded, he thrust it into some receptacle about his person and said nothing. But perhaps he thought the more. His inquiring eye discovered the private door, and Harry pointed out to him the ingenuity with which the wall-paintings were contrived to disguise its existence. He also explained that it led not into the garden, but to the open shore of the bay.

All this he did at some length in order to keep his word to Ismena and delay Mackenzie in his search.

'Ay, it's a verra genteel apartment, but to my mind no verra comfortable,' said the Sergeant, casting a critical eye around him. 'And what may there be below it?'

'There's nothing much below,' replied Harry, painfully aware of his rising colour. 'A storage place for wine and a boat-house, I believe.'

The Sergeant marked Harry's blush and thought he knew the reason for it.

'It would not be according to my instructions, sir, to leave any part of these premises unsearched. Will you and I proceed to search this boat-house or store-room together, Mr. Beaumont? Without the men, I'm meaning.'

Harry assented. But as the two went down the steps of the terrace, he thought of don Diego and De Tremblaye down below — desperate men. He must not put a British soldier into danger to satisfy his own sense of honour or even to protect Ismena. He stopped and put his hand on Mackenzie's arm.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Sergeant,' he said, 'I should like to go into that place first by myself. You and the men wait outside. If you hear me shoot or call out, you can come.' Mackenzie was rather mystified by the mention of possible shooting, but he saw no objection to the proposed arrangement. Moving as silently as possible, they went down from the garden to the small quay. All was dark. The water lapped quietly on the bank; out on the bay they could see the riding-lights of the ships and a silver patch of moonlight travelling over the blackness of the distant water.

Harry took the closed lantern in one hand and a pistol in the other and crept round the corner of the building. He peered into the night to ascertain if a boat were lying anywhere near the quay; but it was too dark to see. The folding doors of the boat-house were open. If it was dark outside it was black as pitch within. He could not detect a sound or movement.

'Is anyone here?' he whispered in Spanish. There was no answer.

'Ismena, doña Ismena! Are you there?'

Still no reply. He held his breath and listened. He could not hear anyone breathing. Opening his lantern, he shot its rays into the depths of the place. There were the wine barrels behind which he had stood, empty cases, rubbish of all kinds heaped on the floor and a broken oar leaning against the wall. But there was neither man nor woman lurking in the corners which one by one he illuminated. He called out to the Sergeant:

THE SPANISH LADY

'Come along, Sergeant! There's no one here.'

While Mackenzie was examining the place for himself Harry stood on the quay looking into the gulf of the night; and he fancied he could detect a faint sound of oars. The capricious patch of moonlight had now come nearer the shore and he caught a glimpse of a silhouette, a dark shape like a crowded boat moving slowly. Then suddenly the clouds snatched up the trailing silver and all was blackness again.

CHAPTER XXVI

LORD WELLINGTON sat at his table, which was covered but not littered with papers, and wrote diligently. To him entered Lady Jane Gervase, very untidy. Good God! Why should women be untidy? They had surely plenty of time in which to make themselves neat, if they could not be beautiful.

He rose to greet her, with his usual courtesy.

'Well, Jane? What is it? I'm busy. I leave this afternoon or to-morrow at latest.'

'You know well enough what I've come about, Arthur. Young Beaumont.'

'You can spare me and yourself the trouble. You must be aware that when I once decide a thing I don't go back upon it. Besides, it's gone out of my hands. There will be a drum-head court-martial to-morrow. I shall not be there, but my evidence has been taken down and duly attested. The court will of course be at liberty to form its own opinion on the matter.'

'Will it? When the Commander-in-Chief gives evidence that a subaltern has refused to obey his orders and treated him with insolence?'

'I may say that in private. It's not put so strongly in the evidence. There's plenty of other evidence that Ensign Beaumont was outside the walls without a Permit.'

'I'll wager there's enough in your evidence to

THE SPANISH LADY

make the court break him. As fine a young officer as you've got in the Service.'

'You're a good officer wasted yourself, Jane, and you know discipline's the first thing. I believe I've always had some fine young officers, But I've had the devil of a job to drive discipline into my army, and I'm not going to relax it to please anyone.'

'It'll be a very unpopular thing with the regiment.'

'Damn popularity! I shall be popular enough when I've whipped Boney.'

'Do listen to me, Arthur. I'm speaking for the sake of your own reputation as well as for the sake of that poor lad. Do you know what every one's saying?'

'No - and don't care.'

'They're saying there's a woman at the bottom of this affair - that you're jealous of young Beaumont because he's trumped your ace with young Condesa de Careno.'

The Chief's self-control almost failed him. An angry light came into his grey eyes.

'I shall take no notice of such contemptible scandal. I should have thought I might have gone to supper at the house of a lady of the Condesa de Careno's rank without aspersions being cast on her morals or on mine.

'Morals! My God!' exclaimed Lady Jane, dropping heavily down on a chair. She gasped or sighed portentously. Then looking her tremendous relative in the face she said with great deliberation: 'Arthur - you are an ass.'

THE SPANISH LADY

The situation had passed beyond words. The Chief moved his head sharply and fixed on his temerarious cousin a glare beneath which even the weather-beaten cheek of Lady Jane Gervase blanched and her stout heart quailed. A moment more and she would have burst into tears; but there was a knock at the door, immediately followed by the entrance of Ellen Ashby. Her godfather greeted her shortly.

'There's no need to say what you've come about, Ellen. I tell you at once it's of no use. The matter of young Beaumont has passed out of my hands. I shall do nothing further. It's for the court-martial to decide what's to be done with him. If he's broke he can of course appeal to the Prince Regent before the verdict is confirmed.'

'Poor Harry! He wouldn't have much chance with the Prince, would he?' She was very pale, but tearless and mistress of herself.

'I simply must tell you, godpapa,' she continued, 'that it was practically I who sent Harry to find you. I was so frightened by what I'd heard from my maid. She has somehow got into the confidence of that Spanish valet of yours, and he has told her very suspicious things about the people at the Quinta. I was so alarmed about you, godpapa. I couldn't bear the idea of your having gone into danger on my account.'

'I'm much obliged to you, my dear,' he returned, endeavouring to keep his patience. 'We all know young ladies will take fright at their own shadows.'

THE SPANISH LADY

But Beaumont's an officer of two years' standing. He'd no business to commit a serious offence against discipline at the instigation of a young girl.'

Ellen wrung her little hands, otherwise she gave no sign of the anguish she was feeling.

'I'm sure if General Crauford were alive he'd have begged you to spare Harry.'

'Crauford would have agreed with me. Let me hear no more about it.'

Wellington spoke curtly; then his face softened and he laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. 'I'm truly sorry for you, my dear, but you're very young, and you'll get over this unfortunate attachment and marry someone who'll do you more credit than this young man.'

Ellen smiled a wan but slightly defiant smile.

'Thank you for your kind wishes, godpapa. But you forget, I've got poor papa's trouble – the faithful heart. If Harry Beaumont still wants me, I shall marry him when I come of age, if he's only a private. But he's sure to be a sergeant by that time.'

'Well, well! We shall see,' returned the Chief, and bethought him that these women were terribly wasting his precious time. 'Now I must ask you two ladies to leave me. I regret that I am unable to meet your wishes, but I cannot spare you another moment.'

Lady Jane and Ellen made their adieux and left the room. When the door had closed behind them, Lady Jane put her hard masculine hand in Ellen's little soft arm and they walked slowly back to

THE SPANISH LADY

their apartment in silence and without any external sign of emotion. They guessed there would be curious eyes upon them. So there were; but the curiosity was sympathetic. Marsland for one was looking at them out of a window. José was unaccountably missing. Lord Wellington could not even spare time to anathematize his valet. Marsland had been instantly detailed to pack his personal effects and was now struggling with that regiment of boots which José had commanded with such consummate skill. Marsland was cursing and perspiring over them, while his friend Sergeant Mackenzie looked on and gave advice.

'There goes my old girl with her young lady,' observed Marsland. 'Been trying to find a soft spot in the Peer's heart, I suppose. I bet you a month's pay they ain't found it.'

'I'm thinking there's a leddy not a hundred miles fra Cadiz that has found it right enough,' returned the Sergeant.

'Ay. And they do say young Beaumont had the bad luck to find a mighty soft spot in hers. But I've heard tell he was not after the lady at all last night, but on the track of some mischief or other being hatched up against the Peer. Did you see anything suspicious about the Condesa's place, Mackenzie?'

Mackenzie took two or three puffs at his *cigarillo* before he answered.

'I'm no saying I did and I'm no saying I didn't. Lord Wellington's charger appears to have been

THE SPANISH LADY

stolen oot of the stables of the Quinta by gipsies – so they say – and verra clever horse-thieves they are. Then I found a pistol belonging to his lordship on the floor of the summer-house, or whatever they ca' it. The pistol had been fired – wha' d'ye think fired it off? Mr. Beaumont was wearin' his ain, which were baith loaded.'

'Do you think the Peer fired it at young Beaumont?' asked Marsland in an excited whisper.

'I'm no sayin' that. But if his lordship didna believe in a conspiracy, what for should he let off a pistol?'

'It don't seem like him,' returned Marsland, meditatively nursing a top-boot. 'But neither do it seem like him to run after a woman, the way he's been running after this Condesa. Seems as if he were in no wise hisself since he was in Cadiz.'

'Na – for he's no himself; he's just a mon wha's soul is ensnared by a strange woman. Ye ken weel what the Scriptures hae to say anent the matter, James Marsland, for ye have whiles hurrd me expound them, until I was threatened wi' the loss o' me stripes, by these puir misguidit sinners in authority, that dinna ken the differ between a Methody and a member o' the Estuablished Kirk o' Scotland.'

'They'll call you as a witness at the court-martial, I suppose,' said Marsland. 'What shall you say about finding his lordship's pistol?'

Mackenzie fixed on his friend a long look of contempt.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Naething,' he replied; and left Marsland to consider alone the problems of the pistol and of the regiment of boots.

Meantime Ellen had gone to a little green balcony from which she was used so joyously to converse with Harry. There was no bright head thrust out of the opposite window now. A pale grave face was visible somewhere behind the glass. Ellen's own face was grave and pale. She shook her head slowly. The face behind the glass smiled as much as to say 'I knew it.'

Here she was startled by the voice of Lady Jane; Lady Jane, who had hitherto steadfastly shut her eyes to the communications passing between the green balcony and the opposite window.

'Ellen!' she exclaimed, 'I'll not have you communicating in this unauthorized way with a prisoner under close arrest. I am shocked at you, my girl. It's clean against the Regulations. Besides there's no need for it, for I've got permission for you and me to visit that poor lad. It's not from your Cousin Arthur I've got it and he need know nothing about it, but glory be to God he's not the only General Officer I know.'

Ellen squeezed her cousin tighter than you would have thought her little arms could have squeezed a body so unyielding.

Cousin Jane began to sniff and two tears ran down her nose. Ellen wiped the tears from the large nose, not unlike the Great Man's.

THE SPANISH LADY

'You mustn't make me cry, Cousin Jane,' she said. 'I've got plenty to say to Harry, and I couldn't say it if I were blubbering all the time, could I?'

So they went to see Harry. He received them as cheerfully as he was able; but a perfectly genuine cheerfulness cannot reasonably be expected of a young man whose promising career is about to be hopelessly blighted. He could not even accept Ellen's brave love with a clear conscience, for he felt that he had not deserved it.

Ellen told him how she and Lady Jane had gone to the Commander-in-Chief and found him perfectly obdurate.

'He would be,' said Harry, smiling bitterly. 'No one ever knew the Peer reverse a judgement, however wrong it might turn out to have been.' But we aren't slaves, even in the army, and if the court had all the evidence before it, I don't believe they'd break me.'

'There's Mattie, of course,' returned Ellen. 'But I suppose they wouldn't pay any attention to her.'

'What other evidence could you call?' asked Lady Jane.

The question of evidence stirred in Harry's mind the maddening recollection of all he could tell if he were not bound by his word to keep silence.

'If only Alava could be found!' he ejaculated, moving restlessly.

'You mentioned him in your note,' returned Ellen. 'And I asked about him. But they say no one knows where he is or when he is coming back.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'That's a pity,' said Harry. 'He's the only man who could really help me. But if he's not here — I' and he shrugged his shoulders with as good an appearance of indifference as he could assume.

'We'll find him, Harry,' cried Ellen, 'if he's anywhere above ground.'

'You can't, my dear girl. No — you must just leave me to my — my luck. I shall always remember how good you've been to me, Nellie, though I should be as bad as your godfather makes me out if I allowed you to go on thinking of marrying me.'

'And how can you help what I think, you silly boy. I'm going to stick to you, Harry, like a particularly sticky limpet. If those stupid men do break you, your father can get you a commission in the Bengal Lancers; and I shall come out to India and marry you. It will be such fun.'

As she was going away, Harry called her back. He caught her hand and said in a low voice, because the sentry and Cousin Jane were just outside the door:

'I did save Lord Wellington's life, Ellen; I swear to you I did.'

Lady Jane now made most exhaustive inquiries as to the whereabouts of Alava. At last she discovered that he had an aunt, a Prioress, a refugee in San Fernando. It was possible she might know where he was. Having acquired this information, Lady Jane hurried back to her apartment, saying to herself as

THE SPANISH LADY

she climbed the stone stair: 'It will be something for the poor child to do, anyhow.'

She found Ellen sitting pen in hand, trying to write a letter to Doctor Beaumont. Harry had begged her to do that for him. She was quite calm, but her girlish beauty, which was hardly indeed beauty, but rather some charm, delicately bright like the bloom on a butterfly's wing, seemed to have been brushed away by the cold touch of grief and anxiety. At the suggestion of riding to San Fernando to find Alava, she brightened up.

'I hope we shall be able to make the Prioress understand,' she said. 'I'll take my little dictionary with me. The phrase book won't be of much use, as they very stupidly omitted to put in it anything about young gentlemen being court-martialled.'

'If only Alava is not a hundred miles away!' Ellen exclaimed, as she settled herself in the saddle.

Lady Jane privately thought 'it likely that he was.

They galloped along the Isthmus as fast as though Cousin Arthur had been with them. When they reached the town there was some time wasted in finding the Prioress. They ran her to earth in a dark room looking into a gloomy *patio* where she apparently spent her days quite contentedly, doing nothing. She was a plump middle-aged woman with alert black eyes which regarded the foreign women suspiciously. It took some time to convince her that Lady Jane and Ellen did not represent some amorous

THE SPANISH LADY

entanglement of her nephew's. The name of Velintón was no passport to her favour. She did not share Alava's admiration for the English general or for any of his compatriots — a nation of heretics. She would have continued to deny all knowledge of her nephew's whereabouts if she had not suddenly met Ellen's pleading gaze. The cord of common womanhood was touched. She made a real effort to understand the girl's halting Spanish; and ended by understanding that Ellen's *novio* was in some danger from which Alava could save him.

'I seldom leave the house, Señoras,' she said, 'but I will give you a note to Gutierrez the wine merchant. He may be able to give you some news of my nephew.'

Hope lit its lamp once more in Ellen's eyes.

'I am sorry, Señora,' she said, 'that I have too few words of Spanish to express my thanks.'

The Prioress looked at her kindly.

'A Señorita with such a smile does not require words,' she replied.

They hurried away and in a tortuous street found the wine merchant's shop. It took some minutes to convince him that the English ladies from Cadiz had not come to taste his famous wines, which all the lords drank so freely. When he had read the note from the Prioress, his ideas changed. This young lady with her fine horse and soldier servant was perhaps the *novia* of the Count. Placing a finger on his lip with a knowing air, he led them to a

THE SPANISH LADY

room at the back of the house, looking on a walled garden.

'This, Señoras,' he exclaimed, throwing out his hands, 'is the room that the General Conde de Alava does me the honour to inhabit. Take this arm-chair, Señora, I beg. The Señorita will prefer to sit in this chair, at the writing-table. It is the one usually occupied by the Conde.'

'But where is the Conde de Alava?' asked Ellen.

'I do not know, Señorita.'

'Will he return soon?'

'Doubtless, if he expects a visit from the ladies.'

'But no—he does not,' cried Ellen. 'It is for a very urgent affair. I beg you to tell me where I can find the Conde.'

The wine merchant began to fear he had made a mistake. He did not know why Alava was living a mysterious life in San Fernando. He had assumed the Conde to be engaged in some 'political intrigue. But suppose there were a woman in it? He must not betray Alava. And after all he couldn't, because he knew nothing. He poured out the nothing that he knew in a flood of rapid talk of which Ellen understood very little. The sight of writing materials on the table beside her suggested what to do. She wrote to Alava. When she had finished her letter, she handed it to Gutierrez and, remembering the Prioress' pretty speech, bestowed on him a smile as captivating as she could command. The smile had its due effect. Gutierrez assured the Señorita, with his

THE SPANISH LADY

hand, on his heart, that he would spare no efforts to have her note delivered.

Mounting in silence, the two ladies trotted quickly through the streets of the town and, gaining the Isthmus, once more urged their horses into a racing gallop.

CHAPTER XXVII

ALL this time Harry was alone in his room, conscious of a sentry at the door. Sometimes he tried to read, sometimes he paced up and down, and once he took up his pistols and looked at them thoughtfully. They offered a short and simple way out of his intolerable position, and he did not lack courage to take it. But what would Ellen and his grandfather say? Surely that it would be more honourable to die fighting for King and Country in the ranks of the army, than to throw his life away on account of a private misfortune. And he had one consolation. He knew, if nobody else did, that he had saved Lord Wellington's life.

He was too much absorbed in his own thoughts for his ears to be very much open to extraneous noises. There was a noise, however, which became too insistent to be ignored. It grew louder and louder, increased to a roar—the roar of a furious mob. At Headquarters there was much movement. Men were passing to and fro in the *patio* in silence or exchanging hurried words. These men also were too much occupied with their own concerns to listen to the voice of the city, until it became insistent. The tumultuous sound swelled louder, drew nearer. Its undertone was a sullen continuous roar, but above that strident, more staccato sounds rose and fell. It was a noise more complex and more terrible than the howl of hunting wolves, or the roar of lions—it

THE SPANISH LADY

was the voice of an infuriated human crowd. The crowd poured out of a narrow street on to the Alameda, struggling and confused. Among them was a more or less organized body of men of the lowest class, with coloured handkerchiefs tied round their swarthy heads. They were pressing upon a few slovenly Spanish soldiers and three or four Alguazils who were escorting two prisoners. The Alguazils were pale, the prisoners were paler. The furious men of the kerchiefs, tall sinewy fellows for the most part, wore knives and some had drawn them. They were bawling together in the hoarse voice common among the Spanish lower orders.

'*Arrastre los! Arrastre los!*' The threat contained in these words was calculated to put fear into the heart of any man. With this sinister word were mingled other cries.

'Death to the Frenchman!'

'Death to the *Afrancesado!*'

With these again less terrifying cries, demanding Velintón.

This ugly raging torrent of humanity streamed under the windows of the English Headquarters. The soldiers had ceased to direct their own movements; they were borne along on the tide. They had succeeded so far in preventing their charges from falling into the hands of the mob, but they could not prevent them from being pelted with stones, ends of cabbages and other more filthy missiles. The be-draggled victims of these assaults had but a few

THE SPANISH LADY

minutes ago been two of the sprucest gentlemen in Cadiz: don Alonzo, Conde de la Peña of the, ~~Latin~~ waistcoats and delicate white hands, and the Vicomte de Tremblaye, with the well-cut London clothes and the spying-glass. The blood of the many grandees of Spain which ran in the veins of don Alonzo could not inspire him with courage; perhaps because the cumulative effect of the grandees had been to endow him with a feeble frame and a defective heart. He staggered along, supported by Alguazils, breathless, with starting eyes, ejaculating from time to time, 'Señores! I am a member of the Cortes. I am a patriot.'

De Tremblaye, though pale and bleeding from the forehead, remained as cool and as haughty in his bearing as his relations in France, when they had faced the tumbril and the guillotine.

'Velintòn! Velintòn!'—the cry rose above the general roar.

Marsland's forehead was showing furrows of care. He still had José's job on his hands as well as his own; and it was no use offering excuses to his lordship. Things must be done 'just so' whatever the difficulties. By reason of this load of care, he was not aware of the riot until it was under the windows of Headquarters. It annoyed him very much.

'These 'ere natives will be raising 'ell in our own street next,' he grumbled. 'Odd rot the bones in their Popish carcasses! They're out for murder, strewth they are, or I'm a Dutchman.'

THE SPANISH LADY

He stepped into the street and looked irritably at the crowd which was surging about the end of it. Sergeant Mackenzie was coming back from a further exploration.

'What's that bloody cordybally doin' down there, Mackenzie?' asked Marsland.

'I'm thinking,' replied Mackenzie, 'they're tearin' some o' their members o' Parliament to pieces.'

• 'His lordship's compliments to 'em, and he'll be obleeged if they'll go across to London and tear up a few of our own,' returned Marsland ironically.

'Na, na, laddie,' replied Mackenzie. 'As Christian men we canna approve their behaviour. D'ye ken what they do to what they ca' traitors in this country? They *arrastrar* 'em, drag 'em along the streets at the tail o' their carts or horses; and their streets, as ye ken, are verra ill-pavet.'

Marsland's attention was distracted. 'Here come my ladies!' he exclaimed. 'Oh damn! What am I to do with 'em?'

Lady Jane and Ellen came clattering down the street.

'Get the leddies instide as quick as ye can, mon,' replied Mackenzie. 'I'm no verra well acquaint wi' horses mysel', but I'll mak' shift to tak' the nags so far as the stables.'

'What's all this hullabaloo about, Fitzroy?' asked the Commander-in-Chief sharply, looking up from his papers.

'A riot, sir, I'm afraid,' replied Lord Fitzroy

THE SPANISH LADY

Somerset, who had stepped to the window. 'There are some Spanish soldiers there, but they don't seem able to make anything of the job. By Jove! they've got hold of De Tremblay — take him for a French spy, I suppose. And there's another man — I can't see who he is. They've got a pair of mules there, and they seem to be tying De Tremblay and the other fellow up to them.'

Wellington put down the papers, frowning.

'Are they?' he asked sharply. 'This must be stopped, Fitz. Go down at once, take any men you can collect and clear the street. Bring in De Tremblay and the other fellow. I won't have people murdered under my window, by God I won't.'

'Very well, sir. But some of them seem to be calling out for you. What if you showed yourself at the window? That might keep 'em quiet a few minutes.'

Lord Fitzroy left the room. Wellington stepped to the window and opened it. As he did so a new note was added to the hubbub outside — a woman's piercing shriek. A carriage had made its way along the Alameda and drawn up near the group which, with ferocious laughter, was occupied in tying the wrists of the fainting don Alonzo to a bar trailing behind the mules. A lady leaped from the carriage and flung herself upon the crowd so suddenly, with such impetus that it parted before her and she stood beside the victim. It was the Condesa de Careno.

THE SPANISH LADY

'Wretches! Monsters!' she shrieked. 'How dare you touch him? Do you know who this is? It is the Conde de la Peña, a member of the Cortes.'

There was a howl of execration.

'He is an *Afrancesado*! — he is a traitor. He has plotted to kill Velintòn.'

'It is not true!' she screamed, clinging frantically to the senseless body of her brother.

A window was flung open above and a voice thundered over the heads of the crowd.

'It is not true. It is a lie. Let the Conde de la Peña go. I command it. I, Velintòn.'

There was a lull in the hubbub. All eyes turned to the open window, the figure standing at it. People began to cry '*Viva Velintòn! Viva the great Velintòn!*'

The cry swept like a hurricane through the crowd. While it drowned more hostile demonstrations, Sergeant Mackenzie, with details of several regiments, came round the corner of the street at the double. Seeing that the mob was for the moment peaceful they drew up on the skirts of it, opposite the Commander-in-Chief's* window. While the storm of homage roared around, the Condesa de Careno kneeled upon the ground, supporting her brother. But as it subsided she rose and, raising her clasped hands towards the window, cried out in piercing tones:

'Velintòn! Help me!'

At the sound of that voice Wellington's heart-

THE SPANISH LADY

strings thrilled as he had hoped, believed they would thrill no more. He answered from the window:

'Do not fear, Señora, I will protect you.'

He shouted an order to Lord Fitzroy Somerset, who now appeared mounted on his charger. In obedience to it, Lord Fitzroy pressed his horse quietly through the crowd in the direction of Ismena and her brother. A torn dirty dishevelled figure struggled out of the grasp of two or three ruffians and fought its way towards him.

'Help, Lord Fitzroy, help!' shouted De Tremblay. 'Save me from these scoundrels.'

Wellington had brought himself with difficulty to acknowledge once or twice the homage of this mob which he loathed and despised. Now addressing them in a clear far-reaching voice, he said:

'Señores, I thank you for your good will. If you have really confidence in me I beg you will disperse immediately and leave your prisoners in my hands.'

It was a voice which compelled obedience and the rabble dropped into sudden silence. It became surprisingly calm, like a sea over which a stormy gust has swept and gone by. The next order came in English.

'Bring in the lady and the prisoners, Somerset. Alguazils too.'

The crowd gave free way to Lord Fitzroy's charger as he pressed right up to the Condesa, calling to Marsland to follow him and giving a short order to Sergeant Mackenzie.

In a few minutes the British soldiers had taken

THE SPANISH LADY

charge of the Condesa, don Alonzo and De Tremblaye. The cords which bound La Peña's hands to the fatal crossbar were cut and he was lifted on to the broad shoulder of Marsland as easily as though he had been a child. Now the dispersed Spanish soldiers reappeared, putting in a half-hearted claim to their prisoners, and were admitted to the British Headquarters. The procession crossed the *patio* and Lord Wellington came to the foot of the stairs to meet them. He received the Condesa with kindness, with solicitude. A doctor was sent for and don Alonzo carried upstairs and laid on Lord Wellington's bed, in a room adjoining his sitting-room. Lady Jane hastened with such remedies as she had, and don Alonzo soon recovered consciousness. He was supported to a chair in the sitting-room. Here Lord Wellington was inquiring into the cause of the riot, through the Alguazils. De Tremblaye had gone to Lord Fitzroy's room to repair the damage done to his dress by the mob.

'Señor Conde,' said Wellington in Spanish, addressing don Alonzo, 'I presume you know the ground for your arrest.'

'It is a lie, your Excellency,' whined La Peña. 'I am accused of being an *Afrancesado*, a traitor — I, de la Peña. It is an infamous lie, your Excellency.'

'There is another accusation against you, Señor,' continued Wellington, 'which however I cannot credit. It is stated that you and some of your relatives were engaged with De Tremblaye in a con-

THE SPANISH LADY

spiracy to murder me at the house of the Condesa de Careno.'

A cry broke from Ismena —

'Madre de Dios!'

'To murder your Excellency!' shrieked her brother. 'Never!'

'I was convinced that it was impossible,' replied Wellington quickly.

'I appeal to your Excellency,' cried don Alonso, rising to his feet, 'to set me free immediately. San Jago, San Ildefonso and San Fernando be my witnesses I am innocent. By the Virgin of the Atocha I would rather die a thousand deaths than hurt a hair of the head of the Hero of Salamanca.'

He was continuing to repeat himself with great volubility, when Wellington stopped him with a gesture, saying:

'I am convinced of your innocence, Señor Conde, but you are a Spanish subject. If you have been legally arrested, I can only keep you here until your personal safety is assured. As to you, De Tremblaye,' he continued in English, addressing the Frenchman who had just come in, 'there has of course been some ridiculous mistake.'

'Assuredly there has, my lord,' returned De Tremblaye, who was perfectly cool and showed but few traces of his recent rough handling. 'My activities on your lordship's behalf have been misconstrued.'

'Glad it has turned out no worse for you,' returned Wellington shortly but cordially.

THE SPANISH LADY

He then turned courteously to the Condesa de Caréno.

'You must wait here, Condesa, until the streets are clear. I beg that you and your brother will partake of a *merinda* with me, while you wait.'

Ismena's long-lashed eyes were lifted to him with an expression which he had never seen in them before. It was a look of humility, of shame; for she had realized only too well on the previous evening the true purpose of the family conspiracy. She had murmured something, she hardly knew what, when the door was opened by Marsland and Alava entered. He was in civilian dress. José came slinking behind him. Alava waited until the Chief addressed him. Then he spoke.

'I understand, milord, that certain persons against whom I am preferring an accusation at the Ministry of Justice are at this moment in your hands. I mean the Conde de la Peña and the Vicomte de Tremblaye,' he continued, shooting out a damnatory finger first at one and then at the other of them as he mentioned their names.

Lord Wellington paused a moment before he replied stiffly:

'I find it difficult to believe, General, that your accusations are well founded.'

Alava did not quail before the Great Man. He was too sure of his ground, too exhilarated at having run his quarry to earth. 'Difficult or not, milord, I fear you will have to believe it,' he retorted; then

THE SPANISH LADY

broke again into Spanish. 'I have the proofs. The Conde de la Peña, Colonel don Diego and other members of the family, have conspired, with the spy, De Tremblaye, to assassinate your Excellency at the Quinta of the Condesa de Careno.'

Wellington, frowning, made a gesture of impatience.

De Tremblaye was watching him narrowly. Alava continued, almost defiantly:

'This Frenchman had corrupted your Excellency's valet José, who has to-day made a statement of the whole affair, so far as he knows it, at the Ministry of Justice. We have made friends with De Tremblaye's landlady. She caused him to sleep very soundly one night, and we took the opportunity to extract some interesting letters from the lining of his clothes, which we replaced after we had read them.'

Here De Tremblaye could not quite repress a slight movement of his hands towards the breast of his coat. Alava, without looking at him, went on:

'We have also found means to intercept his correspondence and that of the La Peña family. There is little doubt, milord, that you would have perished last evening at the house of the Condesa de Careno, had it not been for the action of Ensign Beaumont, to whom I had given a hint before I left Cadiz that your life might be in danger.'

'Where are your proofs, your documents, General Alava?' Wellington demanded.

THE SPANISH LADY

'They are at the Ministry of Justice; but here is your valet, who will bear witness to the truth of what I have told you.'

He thrust forward the grey-faced, quaking José.

'Now, José,' said Wellington sharply and in English, 'tell the truth. Don't be afraid of anyone.'

José fell on his knees.

'I am a poor man, milord. I was offered a fortune only to give notice of your lordship's movements. By the Holy Mother of God I did not know their intentions.'

'You lie, José,' interjected De Tremblaye contemptuously.

José rolled his eyes malignantly towards the Frenchman and asseverated more loudly:

'I did not know. I believed that the La Peña family intended to do something to persuade your Excellency to refrain from pursuing them in the matter of the money. It was only last night, when I learned they had attempted to murder the young officer, that I perceived their terrible design on your lordship.'

'Ensign Beaumont has said nothing of any attempt to murder him,' said Wellington.

'According to José,' returned Alava, 'who however was not in the room at the time — Beaumont's life was saved by the Condesa de Careno on the condition that he should say nothing about what had occurred.'

'I would have saved your life, Wellington, had any

THE SPANISH LADY

one attempted it,' cried Ismena, weeping. 'Never would I have allowed you to be murdered in my house.'

'I am ready to believe, Señora, that you were ignorant of the real purpose of your relatives,' said Alava courteously. 'But there is no doubt that the Conde de la Peña was aware of it.'

Don Alonzo had been sitting huddled in an arm-chair while Alava's indictment proceeded. Only his big black eyes, like those of a hunted hare, were moving and alive. At this mention of his name, he pulled himself up by the arms of the chair.

'No! no, Señores,' he gasped.

With a great effort he rose to his feet and staggered to the table, facing Wellington with uplifted hand.

'By Jesus, Mary and Joseph! By the Holy Virgin of the Atocha! I swear—' he began in a strong voice; and suddenly stopped.

Don Alonzo clapped his hand to his left side and looked from one to other of the company, not as in fear, but rather as in immense astonishment. So he dropped to the floor like a stone.

With a piercing cry Ismena threw herself on her knees beside her brother. Kneeling by his side she raised his head in her arms. The face was a dull red colour and there was death in the half-closed eyes.

'*Gesè!* he is dead! My *hermanito* is dead,' sobbed Ismena.

THE SPANISH LADY

Wellington, leaning over the table with a look of deep concern on his face, seemed to have no eyes, no thought but for the weeping Condesa and her brother.

'Send the doctor at once,' he said.

'He is here,' replied Somerset, opening the bedroom door and beckoning to someone inside. The doctor hastened out and kneeled by the prostrate don Alonzo.

'Take him to my bedroom,' Wellington commanded.

Weeping aloud, with her head covered, like a woman of the East, Ismena followed the doctor into the adjoining room.

There was a scuffle at the door. De Tremblaye had endeavoured to slip out of the room, while attention was concentrated on don Alonzo. The Spanish Alguazils, standing outside, had seized him. Shaking them off, he stepped back into the room and appealed to the Commander-in-Chief.

'My lord, these Spaniards are interfering with my personal liberty. Will you do me the favour to tell them they have no authority in this place.'

'The scoundrel was trying to escape,' exclaimed Alava, darting a look of fury at the Frenchman.

'You must remain here, sir,' said Wellington shortly.

Then beckoning De Tremblaye to the table, he spoke again in a friendlier tone.

'We have heard General Alava's accusation against

THE SPANISH LADY

you, Monsieur de Tremblay. Let us now hear your defence.'

'He has none,' cried Alava, with flashing eyes.

De Tremblay looked at the floor and kept silence.

'I can hardly believe,' continued Wellington, 'that a man whom I have always treated as a gentleman has really conspired against my life, and with Bonaparte too. Your family, sir, have always been conspicuous for their loyalty to the King of France.'

De Tremblay raised his head.

'It is true. They were loyal to the King and disloyal to France. You sent me back to my countrymen, to France, Lord Wellington, to betray her. I knew then that I loved France, that I and mine had been traitors to her. There was one way by which I could atone for that — by destroying her greatest enemy, the only man whom she need fear. England without you, my lord, might continue to wriggle, but it would be with the movements of a galvanized frog without a brain. I have paid you the homage due to a great man, Lord Wellington.'

While De Tremblay was speaking Wellington's face expressed surprise and perplexity rather than anger.

The doctor came out of the bedroom and the Chief turned to him.

'The Conde de la Peña is dead, my lord,' said the doctor gravely.

'Dead?' repeated Wellington. 'What did he die of?'

THE SPANISH LADY

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

'To put it shortly, milord – fright. A weakly man, with a shaky heart. He was pretty roughly handled, I gather.'

A sound of sobs and cries came through the open door of the bedroom.

'Hermanito mio! Gesù! Gesù!'

Wellington leaned forward, his eyes fixed on the doorway.

'The Condesa de Careno,' said Alava, 'need not bewail her brother. Had he not died here, he must have perished more disgracefully.'

De Tremblaye answered him.

'You are right, Señor. Don Alonzo has done well to die, but he has not died well, for he has died of fear. That is a death which cannot possibly be mine – I therefore choose another. Farewell, gentlemen, my enemies.'

Wellington's pistol, brought back by Mackenzie and reloaded, lay on the table. De Tremblaye snatched it up, put it to his head and fired. There were cries, exclamations. De Tremblaye staggered, would have fallen to the ground, but Lord Fitzroy caught him.

'Well, Fitzroy?' questioned Wellington.

'He has shot straight, milord,' replied Lord Fitzroy, looking at De Tremblaye's slightly convulsed face.

'Another one has saved the executioner trouble,' interjected Alava.

THE SPANISH LADY

'The man has been guilty of very gross treachery to me,' said Wellington, 'but he has died like a gentleman. Take him away.'

The body of De Tremblaye was carried from the room by Marsland and an Alguazil.

'And now,' said Wellington, 'I hope we have done with this vexatious affair and can proceed with business.'

'My lord,' remonstrated Alava, 'there are other conspirators still at large. The leaders of the plot, after De Tremblaye, were Colonel don Diego de la Peña, the Marqués de Montespínosa and the Abbé de la Peña. These men have been hiding in a South American ship, anchored in the bay. They must have learned this morning that their plot was discovered, for the ship has sailed for Buenos Aires. The Spanish Government has no ship in a condition to pursue them. Will your Excellency procure a British cruiser to do so?'

'No, sir,' replied Wellington. 'I shall not ask a British cruiser to waste her time in trying to catch and bring back two or three scoundrels whom nobody wants. They won't dare to return to Spain, and it's of no consequence if they do. I don't design to stop in the country myself much longer.'

Alava shrugged his shoulders and smiled resignedly.

'*Caramba*, milord! The Ministry of Justice will be disappointed. For my part, I will be satisfied with

THE SPANISH LADY

the knowledge that your Excellency's precious life has been preserved.'

'It does seem as though there'd been more danger than I was willing to believe,' returned Wellington. 'I thank you very sincerely, Alava, for having, under Providence, protected my life, which I hope will be a useful one to my country.'

'Milord,' replied Alava, taking Wellington's outstretched hand and pressing it with tears in his eyes, 'it is a life of inestimable value, not only to England, but to Spain, to the world.'

A priest passed through to the bedroom. The soldiers and Alguazils were dismissed.

'And now,' said Wellington in a tone of relief, 'we can think about getting away.'

'A moment, milord!' exclaimed Alava. 'There is that young man, . Beaumont. Before your Excellency leaves Cadiz will you not counter-order the court-martial which was to sit upon his case, or at any rate cancel your evidence against him? I myself gave the young man instructions to watch the Quinta, and guard your Excellency's person against possible danger.'

Wellington paused a moment before replying:

'Had I been aware of the circumstances I might have acted differently. But the court-martial has been ordered and must now proceed. I shall not cancel my evidence. It contains nothing but the truth. You yourself can of course make any statement you like in Beaumont's defence.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'I shall say that he saved your Excellency's life at the risk of his own,' returned Alava, with gentle but dignified reproach.

'Possibly he did,' replied Wellington. 'But he was damned insubordinate while he was about it.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

ELLEN could not resign herself to staying in Lady Jane's apartment. She hung about the *patio*, with Mrs. Matthews in attendance, eager to hear what was going on. The Plot appeared to have been unmasked; but there was the Condesa de Careno and Cousin Arthur's obstinacy to be reckoned with. When Alava came in at the gate she flew to meet him.

'You received my note, sir?' she asked.

'I did, Señorita,' he replied. 'I received it quickly, and it made me somewhat hasten my proceedings, which was fortunate, as otherwise Lord Wellington might have left Cadiz before the prisoners were secured. You need not fear for your friend Ensign Beaumont. We have ample proof of the Plot against Lord Wellington's life: enough to convict De Tremblaye and the La Peña family over and over again. It must be plain to every one now that Beaumont saved the life of the Commander-in-Chief.'

He hurried on, followed by José, whose presence Ellen hardly noticed and Mrs. Matthews contemptuously ignored.

Ellen flew up the stairs, two steps at a time, and hurled herself on to the green balcony. On her flying path she snatched up a bag of beads with which she was making Lady Jane a purse. They were very pretty beads which she could not easily replace, nevertheless she rained handfuls of them on Harry's

THE SPANISH LADY

window-pane. At length, when scarcely any beads were left, the window opened and Harry's face appeared; pale, but smiling with a resolute forced smile.

'Put your head out!' she cried eagerly. 'I've got some topping news for you.'

The head popped out at once.

Standing on a flower-pot and leaning perilously far over the green railing, Ellen talked at a breathless pace.

'Alava's here,' she said. 'He says they've got proof positive of that Plot. They've cotched De Tremblaye and the Condesa de Careno's brother, and Alava's gone to tell Cousin Arthur all about it.'

Harry, leaning out of the window, looked bewildered, hardly seemed to take in what she was saying.

'By Jove! Is that what the row was about? Gad, what a rabble! Did they *arrastrar* anyone?'

'No — we didn't allow them to. But hang 'em all! I don't care a dam' what they did. Harry! Man alive! don't you see? You're saved! No court-martial for you, Ensign Beaumont, I think.'

The iron had entered deeper into Harry's soul than had appeared. He smiled, but gravely.

'I'm not so sure of that, Nellie. Anyhow they'll understand I had strong reasons for doing what I did.'

'I should just think so!' and she started dancing about recklessly on the top of the flower-pots.

THE SPANISH LADY

Here's the man who saved Lord Wellington's life! No doubt about it, gentlemen! The thanks of a grateful country, and all that! Three cheers! Hip, hip, hip hooray! Why don't you join in, you dull boy?"

'I can't yet, Nellie,' he replied, smiling a little at her antics. 'I can't think of anything except what a trump you are. If I did happen accidentally to save Lord Wellington's life, it was only what any other man in the army would have done if it had happened to him. And I'm not half good enough for you, Nell, and never shall be.'

Ellen received this heartfelt speech with a heartless laugh; or a laugh which appeared heartless.

'Then I shall have to get worser and worser till I'm bad enough for you. That's easily done, my boy!'

Harry leaned far out of the window and looked round.

'There doesn't seem to be anyone about,' he said. 'Suppose you stand on that biggest flower-pot. I believe I could touch your hand then, if you stretched it out.'

Ellen stood on the flower-pot and stretched both hands up and out over the green railings quite perilously far. Even so they could only just touch the tips of each other's fingers. But with their eyes they embraced fondly.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE doctor and the priest had left the chamber of death. There was still one more to leave it. Wellington remained alone in his sitting-room. He sat by the table and should have been busy, but was doing nothing. The bedroom door opened softly and Ismena stood before him, her mantilla drawn closely round her. Her eyes, her cheeks were stained with tears, but nothing could mar her beauty and her port was proud. Wellington rose to his feet. She stood still in the middle of the room and both were silent.

Then she said: 'Have you nothing to say to me, Arthur?'

He shook his head. He was not looking at her but at a point in the floor beyond her.

She spoke again: 'Nothing,' Velintòn, for the woman you loved?'

'Nothing for the woman who betrayed me.'

'But I have something to say to you, milord. I want to tell you the truth.'

'You need not. I know it.'

She replied with quiet dignity:

'That is well, milord. For if indeed you know the truth, you know that I have never conspired against your life.'

'I believe that's true — but I considered myself as safe in your house as in my own and you were harbouring a pack of rascals who you must have known

THE SPANISH LADY

to be plotting something. And you say you knew nothing of the trap they were setting — you who served to bait it.'

'I did know something,' she replied.

He looked up sharply.

'What?'

'They told me they would hold you prisoner unless you promised to renounce your iniquitous persecution of my father, my family. I believed that you would yield.'

'You did, did you?'

'I swear to you, Velintòn, I did not dream they meant to kill you.'

She was standing close to him now. Her face suffered none of the contortion of weeping, but tears welled up to the beautiful eyes she raised to his and hung in crystal drops on the long black lashes.

'I ask your pardon, Arthur,' she said humbly.

He looked at her, reluctantly, conscious of a terrible weakness under her eyes, her voice, her touch; for she had laid her soft hand upon his.

'I suppose you would have betrayed me some other way, if not that,' he said, trying to steel himself. 'You can't have loved me much, Ismena.'

'Surely as much as you loved me, *amigo*?'

'I? But my God! I loved you — I love you as I have never loved any woman in my life.'

'You love me in your leisure moments. How much of your life is that? You spoke calmly of part-

THE SPANISH LADY

ing from me last night. That is not how a lover feels. No, Velintòn! It is your country that you love, it is Victory that is your mistress, not Ismena.'

'Ah! You don't understand,' he groaned, crushing her little hand between his own.

'No, I don't understand — I shall never understand,' she replied with the ghost of a smile. 'You too will never understand. But try to forgive me, Arthur, and believe that I would have died before. I would have let them kill you.'

'I must believe you,' he almost whispered. 'I couldn't bear not to.'

She disengaged her hand from his and laid it on his shoulder.

'Then let us kiss and say good-bye,' she said; and lightly touched his lips with her own.

He caught her to his breast and kissed her with hard kisses.

'Adios, Ismenita! *Creatura de me alma, de me cuore!*' he whispered hoarsely. Then suddenly, as with an effort, put her away from him and stood apart with bent head.

There was a knock at the door.

'Come in,' he said in his normal voice.

Ellen came in. She stopped, surprised, embarrassed at finding there the Condesa de Careno, the villainess of the Plot.

'Do not alarm yourself, Señora Condesa,' said Lord Wellington. 'I am convinced of your innocence and will see to it that you are not molested.'

THE SPANISH LADY

'I am infinitely grateful to you, milord,' the Condesa replied. '*Adios* and a thousand thanks.'

She dropped a curtsy. He stepped to the door and opened it for her.

'*Adios, Condesa, y vaya con dios,*' he said with grave courtesy.

So Ismena passed out and he closed the door behind her.

'Well, Ellen?' he said; and thought to himself, 'Why can't these women leave me alone?'

Something in his aspect intimidated the girl; but she pulled herself together because she had to speak for Harry.

'You are just leaving, are you not, godpapa?'

'I certainly ought to be getting off; so if you have anything to say, my girl, be quick about it.'

Ellen was feeling very nervous and her voice trembled a little as she spoke.

'You do know, don't you, that Harry was not foolish last night? That he had good reasons for going to fetch you from the Quinta?'

'Yes, yes. General Alava has told me all about it.'

'Poor Harry couldn't tell you he was all but murdered himself, because he had promised the Condesa de Careno not to. But he wouldn't be alive now if Sergeant Mackenzie hadn't come in the nick of time.'

The Chief's mouth set obstinately.

'The Condesa de Careno would never have permitted me or anybody else to be murdered in her house.'

THE SPANISH LADY

Ellen, who was confident that the Condesa had been foremost among the conspirators, was dumb-founded. For Harry's sake, however, she controlled herself.

'At any rate Harry did risk his life to save yours, godpapa. He makes no boast of it, he says he did nothing but his duty; but it does seem hard if he is to be punished for doing it.'

'The court-martial has been ordered and must be held,' returned Wellington. 'But all the circumstances will be before the Court and will of course be taken into consideration. Ensign Beaumont will not be broke. You can make your mind easy on that score. But let me tell you, Ellen, that it does not become a young lady to interfere in the affairs of a young man to whom she is in no way related and to whom she cannot be engaged to be married.'

While speaking he had dropped into a chair, as though he were rebuking a subaltern instead of a young lady. Ellen trembled and could hardly refrain from tears. Nevertheless she replied bravely:

'But whether I am engaged to him or not, he is the man I am going to marry. If there were anything in the world that could make me give Harry up, godpapa, it would be your disapproval of him. But you see I'm too like poor papa, I can't change.'

In fact at that moment she wore such a look of the kind friend of Arthur Wellesley's youth that he was deeply touched.

'My child,' he stammered. 'My dear girl —'

THE SPANISH LADY

'If Harry doesn't get killed,' she continued, 'and he's so rash I'm often afraid he must be — please try not to dislike us.'

'Dislike you, Ellen? What do you mean? Everybody knows I've got a hard heart, but it's not so hard that I could dislike you, little lady.'

'But you seem to dislike Harry — I don't know why. And when we're married it will be the same as though you disliked me, because he'll be my husband and I couldn't bear you not to like him.'

Wellington was silent a moment. Perhaps he stood before the Court of his own heart. Then —

'Ellen,' he said gravely, 'any man who becomes your husband will always find a friend in me.'

'Thank you, dear godpapa,' she returned. 'You are always so very kind. I know I oughtn't to have come, but I couldn't help it. Good-bye, and thanks — more thanks than I can say.'

Timidly, lightly, she laid her soft young lips upon his silvering hair, and stepped towards the door. There she paused and a charming smile dimpled her cheek.

'I suppose we shan't see you again until you've whacked Boney,' she said; and vanished like a sprite.

CHAPTER XXX

IN the swift-gathering dark of the southern evening the Commander-in-Chief had ridden fast along the Isthmus to San Fernando. There had followed 'parleyings with certain people of importance' at supper and afterwards. A sleep, sound and immediate as a boy's, an uprising with the sun; more parleyings with Spaniards, who, whatever their other forms of indolence, were no slug-a-beds. Yet they always succeeded in squandering an appreciable amount of his time. Therefore the sun was already high above the Eastern Sierras before the Chief rode out of San Fernando. Northwards he rode along the shore of the bay, alone, ahead of his companions. The ground was too rough for fast going. At a certain point he drew rein and turned his face towards the west. Either the beauty of the prospect drew his eyes that way or the instinct which bids a man take a long last look at a place where he has enjoyed or suffered much, which he has known intimately and sees perhaps for the last time. There, far across the wide waters of the bay, lay Cadiz, half closing the entrance. Glittering white it shone, like a city of alabaster, between the vivid green of the rolling Atlantic and the still blue of the inland sea. He raised his glasses. The trees and buildings of the low-lying Isthmus showed clear as a coloured print in the morning light. On the hither side of Cadiz he could see the Quinta of the Condesa de Careno, the

THE SPANISH LADY

garden-house, the green foliage of its orange-grove. Behind those distant walls was even now the woman who had taught him so much of the ecstasy and the pain of Love, who had given him the illusion that he, Arthur Wellesley, could be, was, loved for himself alone. The dream was over, and soon the bitterness of disillusion would be over too. But neither the sweetness nor the bitterness would he ever quite forget. He thought of Ellen. He thought that if as a younger man he had had the luck to win such a love as she was so prodigally bestowing on a youth of no importance, he might have been a faithful husband and altogether a better man than he was. But women did not love him, never had loved him; and that was the end of it. Thank God his mind was usually too much occupied with graver matters to trouble himself about them. Only sometimes it hurt. But some men had one kind of luck, some another. There was not a man on earth with whom he would have exchanged lots at that moment. His army was at length what he had tried to make it, his enemies in England and among the Allies were subdued; he could go right on, unthwarted, with his plan of campaign, and he felt confident as to the result. Most triumphant thought of all, Bonaparte, the World's mighty idol of brass, was beginning to totter on his feet of clay.

Somewhere in the distance the skirl of pipes, the sound of drums and fifes, became faintly audible. He called out to Lord Fitzroy Somerset:

THE SPANISH LADY

'Hullo, Fitz! There they are! We mustn't miss 'em.'

He began scrambling his horse over brown ditches and hummocks, through blue clumps of cactus, towards the main road: a road chiefly recognizable by the depth of its ruts. A contingent of the troops left in Cadiz was being marched along it northwards. The officers in command had expected to meet Lord Wellington earlier. Soon swift scouts brought them word that he was posted on a hummock at a bend of the road a little further on, waiting for them to pass. A thrill ran through every man. There was a brief halt. The ranks were dressed. The pipers were rallied and came marching handsomely round the bend; after them a company of Highlanders with dancing kilts. A stream of red-coated Guards followed. There were many recruits among them, but veterans stiffened the ranks. Healed of their wounds, reposed from the toils, the triumphs and disappointments of the autumn campaign, they marched proudly, conscious of deeds and endurances behind them. The recruits imitating them, marched proudly too, looking forward to valorous deeds and great adventures. The dust of the dry road smoked up under their rhythmically beating feet. The drums beat loud, the fife whistled shrill. The Commander-in-Chief, upright on his charger, wrapped in his dark cloak, took the salute as ceremoniously as though his whole army were marching past. In his imagination it was so. In that handful of men he gazed in the

THE SPANISH LADY

Army, the weapon of his forging. He heard the tramp of battalion after battalion of war-hardened veterans. In those young fresh-coloured recruits he saw all those yet across the sea and knew that, fitted into that frame he had fashioned for them, they would fight as well as any veteran of them all.

A handful of such boys came last of all, a grey-haired sergeant and a young Ensign marching with them. The Ensign's worn though neat uniform showed him to be a veteran in spite of his youth. As the young man saluted he turned a pair of very blue eyes and a pale, rather haggard young face towards the Commander-in-Chief. Wellington recognized Harry Beaumont; and he smiled one of his infrequent smiles at the man that Ellen loved. The drums and fifes struck up a tune. The Chief listened a moment.

'What's that they're playing, Fitz?' he asked.

Lord Fitzroy hesitated before he answered:

'I don't know, my lord. Some old-fashioned thing.'

A voice from the group behind spoke up.

'Yes, it's an old tune called "Farewell and adieu to you all Spanish ladies."'

'And a very good tune too,' said Lord Wellington.